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The Reception in Transylvania of Karl Barth's Theology of the Word of God

József Kovács

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Open University, United Kingdom, through Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, May 2006

Abstract

The influence of Karl Barth's theology on the Reformed Church of Romania was the major theological development of the twentieth century history of doctrines in the Protestant churches of Transylvania. The Hungarian speaking Reformed Church in Romania, after World War I, due to border changes, became isolated from her sister church in Hungary and came to play an important role in preserving Hungarian culture and national existence.

After the failure of liberal theology a number of ways were attempted to bring renewal to church life. This thesis focuses on the process of reception of Karl Barth's theology, which was read against the background of a confessional Calvinism, the Transylvanian form of the Calvin-renaissances in Europe.

Since the process of the reception of Karl Barth's theology in Transylvania was halted with the emergence of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe at the mid 1940s, this thesis concentrates mainly on the 1920s and 1930s. A special attention is given to the theology of Sándor Tavaszy, professor at the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár (Cluj) who had a pioneering role in popularising Karl Barth's theology among the Hungarians.

The contextual study of the reception of Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God refers to the general situation of the Hungarians in Romania after World War I, that of the relationship between church and society and the analysis of the philosophical and theological context. To make the understanding of Barth's reception easier three models of initial responses are presented. The emerging theology resulting from the impact of Barthian thought on indigenous thinking is analysed and compared with Barth's own thinking. The research draws the attention of the reader that to benefit from the full potential impact of Barth's theology, a consistently following of Karl Barth's theological development is needed.

The conclusion of the thesis points towards the possibility of constructing a theology of culture along the lines of Barthian thinking, a theology which is, as always was, a serious task for the Reformed community of Transylvania.

THE RECEPTION IN TRANSYLVANIA OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD OF GOD

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

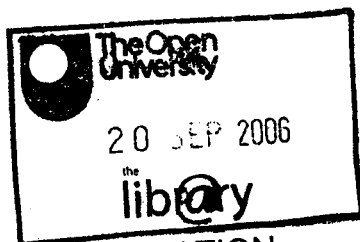
Doctor of Philosophy

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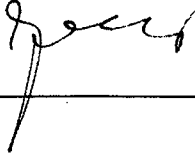
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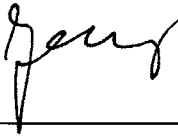
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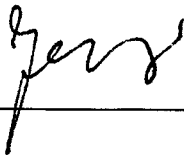
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many to thank for helping to bring this research to completion. I am especially grateful for the support of Regent's Park College in Oxford for providing the scholarship which enabled me to be involved in this research. This institution served as a second home for me during the years in which I worked on this project. I am grateful to Dr. Paul Fiddes, the principal of the college and my director of studies, for all his excellent intellectual guidance and moral support to continue in times of difficulties.

I am also thankful for the guidance and reassurance of my second supervisor Dr. Harriet Harris, who helped me in issues related to Calvinism and Conservative Protestantism. I admire her patience and steadiness in working with me.

Many friends and institutions supported me financially and spiritually to whom I owe thanks and appreciations. Besides the support I received from Regent's Park College I especially want to name David and Valerie Hornsby from Romanian Aid Fund, Dr. Floyd James Parker from Teleios Ministries in South Carolina and the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

The research for this thesis has been done at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in the scholarly environment of which I was formed intellectually and spiritually. I appreciate the contribution of mentors, lecturers and seminar leaders (too many to name them all) in receiving the academic insight necessary for my work. The atmosphere of the research seminars, the readiness and kindness of OCMS staff, the multicultural and nondenominational ethos of the Centre constitute a life experience for me. For everything I gained through OCMS I am tremendously thankful.

Without the kind help from the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár this research could have not been done. Almost all the sources for this research are from the library of this institution. I am thankful for the kindness and patience with which I was helped by the librarians Mr. Géza Sógor, Mrs. Gerébné Erzsébet Zoltay and Mrs.

Adorjániné Mária Dávid. The discussions on the topic of the research with Dr. Tamás Juhász, the rector of this educational establishment were illuminating and gave me precious insights.

I am also thankful for those around me who understood that during my extended research time I give less attention to them as it would have been otherwise. I remember the congregation of the Baptist churches in Torda, Margitta and Nagybánya where I served as a minister during the time of the research, churches that agreed to have a 'studying pastor' and support the consequences resulting from this fact.

Finally, I express my gratitude to my wife Ágnes Mária Kovács who shared with me the pressures that accompanied my research, and upon whom the burden of our family was laid, while I was away or otherwise busy with my work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Az Út	Az Út [The Way] – Reformed magazine
CD	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
DPL	Debreceni Protestáns Lap [Protestant Journal of Debrecen]
EgyÚ	Egy Út [One Way] – Reformed magazine
ER II	Karl Barth, <i>The Epistle to the Romans</i> , translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: University Press, 1933)
ErdMúz	Erdélyi Múzeum [Transylvanian Museum] – Reformed Magazine
ERE	Erdélyi Református Egyház [Transylvanian Reformed Church] – Reformed magazine
EREK	Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület [Transylvanian Reformed Church District]
ET	English translation
GD	Karl Barth, <i>The Göttingen Dogmatics, Instruction in the Christian Religion</i> , Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1991
Ge	German
Gr	Greek
Hu	Hungarian
IE	Igazság és élet [Truth and Life] – Reformed magazine, Hungary
Inst	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of Christian Religion</i> , Vol. I. II. ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Vol. I, II, London: S.C.M. Press, 1961
KáVi	Kálvinista Világ [Calvinist World] – Reformed Magazine
KRE	Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület [Királyhágómellék Reformed Church District]
KREK	Kolozsvári Református Egyházkerület [Kolozsvár Reformed Church District]
Kszó	Kiáltó Szó [Calling Voice] – Reformed magazine
Lat	Latin
MFSz	Magyar Filozófiai Szemle [Hungarian Philosophical Review]
nd	publication with no date mentioned
NN	no author's or editor's name mentioned

PEIL	Protestán Egyesületi és Iskolai Lap [Protestant Associational and School Journal] – liberal theological publication
PSz	Protestáns Szemle [Protestant Review]
PT	Pásztortűz [Herdsman's Campfire] – the magazin of the Transylvanian Writers' Society
PTSz	Protestáns Tudományos Szemle [Protestant Scientific Review]
RE	Református Egyház [Reformed Church] – Reformed magazine
Ref	Reformáció [Reformation] – Reformed magazine
REZSIS	Református Zsinati Irodája Sajtóosztálya [The Press Office of the Reformed Church Synod] (in Hungary)
RSz	Református Szemle [Reformed Review], published in Kolozsvár
Studia	Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvaniensis, Cluj-Napoca – Theological Journal of the Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Protestant Theology
ThSz	Teológiai Szemle [Theological Review], Reformed journal published in Debrecen, Hungary

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THIS STUDY

Transylvania, the north-western region of modern Romania, is an interesting piece of land in Europe. The geography of the land is varied; along the rivers spread fertile plains, hilly fields, mountains covered by forests and alpine peaks that stretch to the sky. The landscape has marked the life of the three nations that live together in this region: Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons. The sons of all three nations are equally Transylvanians but in spite of some common features, these three nations significantly differ from each other. Most of them lived in ethnologically well defined islands for centuries, which are observable still today, where they form self-contained cultural blocks.

On this small land specific features of Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon cultures were formed. There were times when this multicultural community did more for the benefit of the nations whose sons were cut off from this region than their majority nation outside Transylvania. This place is a small world enclosed by the corner of the East- and South range of the Carpathians. Nevertheless, it developed a specific way of life for itself, and for this reason, Transylvania is not secluded. Many of the modern ideas and movements were received first by the Transylvanian representatives of the nations inhabiting this country.

This is true in relation to the topic of our thesis, too. Dialectical theology associated with Karl Barth's name, a new trend for Transylvanian Reformed theological

thinking, was first received among Hungarians by those who lived here in a cultural and church context in which this Hungarian minority was struggling for its survival on this land. Barth's reception happened in that period of the 20 years that is called the first Romanian rule in Transylvania; between the Trianon Treaty¹ (1920) and the Second Vienna Award (1940).

The Reformed church, to which approximately eight hundred thousand people, half of the Hungarian population of Transylvania, belonged played an important historical role in that part of the world both in terms of secular and ecclesiastical history. The twentieth century has been one of the most difficult periods in the life of the Hungarians, since after World War I, Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, including Transylvania, and about 1.5 million Hungarians became citizens of Romania. The Hungarians were forced into a minority situation, being cut off from the whole of Hungarian political and cultural life.

A. The Importance of the Study of the Theology of the Word of God in the Protestant Context of Transylvania

The first half of the twentieth century was difficult for the church as well. Theologically it went through the same struggles that were characteristic of the Protestant world in Europe; the fall of liberal theology, searching for new forms of renewal, facing political and cultural issues. On the cultural level, the Reformed church faced an extra task of providing ideological guidance for the new minority situation of the Hungarians in Transylvania. The resources of the 'old theologies' of the nineteenth century dried up so

¹ The treaty regulated the new borders of Hungary after it lost the war on the side of Germany.

a new impulse was needed. The emerging dialectical theology, through Karl Barth, its major exponent seemed to promise the necessary driving force.

It is generally accepted that from the mid 1920s, when Karl Barth first became known in Transylvania, to the late 30s and early 40s, Reformed theology came under the influence of Barth and his dialectical theology. Due to the historic situation – social disturbance caused by the Second Vienna Award in 1940 and then the Communist regime-change in 1948 – the reception of Barth's theology not only slowed down, but also halted. After the collapse of Communism in 1989, in terms of Barthian studies – as in many other areas of studies – scholars, if they wanted to work in a certain field were faced with basically the same situation as in the mid 1940s. Censorship and Communist hegemony had frozen intellectual work and ideologised the studies in humanities. The little that was written on my subject during the Communist time was more or less a commentary, or a presentation for the new generation of theologians and churchmen about what earlier generation achieved. This study focuses on the 1920s and 1930s, but I also want to give some incentives to renew Barthian studies by highlighting certain topics that have emerged from our study.

Considering the calendar of Barth's publications and the historical situation in Transylvania it is clear that Barth's early work was given a reception there. From Barth's dialectical phase, however, the Hungarians in Transylvania were most impressed with Barth's theology of the Word. István Juhász was right when he said that Karl Barth's theology 'was recognised and given acceptance as the doctrine of the Word' (Juhász I 1966:348). For this reason, I am focusing on the theology of the Word of God, but at the same time, I am dealing with those issues and doctrines that were influenced and determined by the doctrine of the Word of God. The reception of Barth in Transylvania in the above-mentioned period was not fully aware of Barth's dogmatic development, a fact that was reflected in the names and attributes that were attached to

Barth's theology. Expressions like 'dialectical theology', 'theology of the Word', 'new Reformation theology' were understood to mean the same thing. The lack of the understanding Barth in the process of his theological development deprived the theology that resulted from the impact with Barthian thought of the dynamism that otherwise would have been resulted.

The reason for revisiting the events and theological debate of the interwar period is neither purely historical, nor it is due only to personal interest in an influential theologian such as Karl Barth. It is rather a search for a theology that can lead to church revival, and the revitalization of Christianity in a post-Communist situation. The theology of Karl Barth was originally hailed as providing such a possibility and its reception in Transylvania was considered an accomplished fact. This is what Zsolt Geréb wrote in 2004: 'We should thank our Lord, and we certainly do, that the life work of the theologian from Basel renewed our theology and church as well' (Geréb Zs 2004:285). My initial impression however was that Barth's theological influence in Transylvania did not in fact lead to the result that might have been expected in the light of the importance of Barthian thought in present-day Protestantism. This impression prompted the need for a historical and theological investigation of what actually happened in the reception of this great theologian. How was he understood? How were certain features of his theology received? Was it a slavish reception or a more creative one? Were the effects emerging from Barth's theology at work in the Transylvanian context, or were they lost in the process of reception? How did the minority situation, the strong cultural relatedness of Transylvanian theology, and the strong allegiance to a form of people's church determine the way in which Barth was interpreted?

Besides the actual process of reception, I also investigate the shape of the theology emerging from the contact of Barthian thought with the existent indigenous theological thinking. During the research I realised that Barth's doctrine of the Word of

God had its major impact on the doctrines and practices in Transylvania delimited by the area of preaching, Christian education, mission of the church and personal piety. The issue of theology of culture, however, can be considered as a central point around which all other issues are revolving.

It should be obvious that the reception of a theological system does not mean a total and uncritical acceptance of that system, but a dialogue of certain degree with the indigenous theology and culture; it is an appropriation, an adaptation. The process and the outcome of the reception are determined by the variables of the dialogue and the areas and directions of changes which the receiving end community is ready to take.

Young-Gwan Kim (2003:73-85) talks about the relative easiness with which the theology of Karl Barth has been received in Korea. Influenced by Karl Barth's Christocentrism in Korea appeared Minjung theology, which is 'an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experience of Christians' in the 1970s (Kim 2003:76). Young-Gwan Kim links this theological movement with Barth as follows:

For Minjung theologians the church as community is an event. This is because Jesus Christ exists as the friend or the head of his people in accordance with Barth's fundamental doctrinal affirmation of Jesus Christ as the head of the community' (Kim 2003:76).

Barth's theology of the Word became the basis for the Korean practical theology as far as Barth's practical theology was adopted as an 'exemplary model of church growth' and the Korean theologians 'were also eager to apply his ecclesiology to their pastoral ministries' (Kim 2003:80). In Korea Barth's theology was regarded as an incentive and as a proper expression of what the indigenous theological program wanted to achieve.

The case of the North-American reception of Karl Barth's theology by the evangelicals was quite different. Various reactions emerged from a very sophisticated

theological context; nevertheless the overall reaction was one of rejection. Evangelicals did not want to take the challenge of change demanded by the Barthian thought, since that community was not yet ready to abandon its rationalistic and positivistic approach to theology. For this reason many theologians regarded Barth a foe who threatens their system.

Gregory G. Bolich (1980:57-99) enumerates the reactions to Barth of some theologians. Here I refer only to a few to illustrate the fact that Barth was measured against their own theological position and rejected because he did not fit into it. Holms Rolston said: 'The Barthian move towards orthodoxy was not a "return to fundamentalist position on the inerrant word"' (quoted by Bolich 1980:65). Cornelius Van Til rejected Barth basically on a philosophical ground and he complained against Barth that he built on a Kantian understanding of the noumenal-phenomenal divide, which Van Til rejected. He said: 'The Theology of Crisis is a friend of modernism and a foe to historic Christianity' (quoted by Bolich 1980:69). Both Gordon Clark and Clark Pinnock disapproved Barth's 'irrationality'. Clark, referring to Barth's theology said: 'On the one hand there are clear and strong assertions of rationality and logic, but sometimes there are hesitations that lead the reader to suspect a sort of irrationalism ... revelation fails of intelligible definition' (quoted by Bolich 1980:78). According to Pinnock Barth caused an epistemological disaster: 'Barth is the greatest fideist of the twentieth century and allergic to Christian evidences, even as Kant and Kierkegaard, his mentors were before him' for Barth 'faith is a close circle without bridges to the public areas of human knowledge and truth' (quoted by Bolich 1980:79). Bolich's conclusion about Barth's reception in North-American evangelicalism thus seems justified: 'Critics who find in Barth a foe of evangelical faith tend to share a common apologetic outlook, with a rigid adherence to inerrancy, a strong predilection for apologetics and a preference for Christian rationalism' (Bolich 1980:75).

The Transylvanian context also determined the way in which Barth was read and received. This context, however, was different both from Korea and North-America. In Transylvania the reception of Karl Barth was not only shaped by culture, but at the same time was shaped by the desire to preserve a culture which became related to the Reformed and minority ethos during the centuries.

The conclusion towards which this thesis is moving is that Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God in Transylvania was a powerful theological incentive towards an indigenous theological thinking. Barth's ideas were critically received and they did not lead to the full implementation of a Barthian theology in Transylvania; rather they served the interest of an emerging neo-Calvinist theology. This helped the church to clarify its position on the theology of the Word and revelation using certain elements of Barth's theology, but the resulting theology did not follow the course of Barthian thought. For this reason, the full positive impact of Karl Barth's theology could not be felt in theology and church life.

Recently only a few major works were written about Karl Barth's theological significance for Transylvania. In 2005, however, Árpád Ferencz published his dissertation on the topic with the title: *The Influence of Karl Barth's Theology on the Reformed Church of Romania* (Ferencz 2005). This work is mainly historical and descriptive of the process of Barth's reception having in focus various personalities in Transylvania. In this study I enter in dialogue with Ferencz at the few places where the two works touch the same issues. This study differs from Ferencz's not only in the way the topic is approached, but in its critical outlook as well.

The writer of this present thesis belongs to the Hungarian Baptist community in Transylvania. The academic theology of this community, due to its specific historical situation, is in incipient phase. The hope that this community can learn something from the process of reception of Barth's theology was a constant companion in research. Not

least important was the desire that by the lessons of this research a more positive climate and a desire for dialogue would set in between the Baptist and Reformed churches, something that has been missing during the one and a half centuries of Baptist witness in Transylvania.

B. The Outline of the Thesis

This thesis follows the line of the historical development of doctrines since the reception of Karl Barth was first of all a historical phenomenon. The historical approach however is supplemented by a theological examination of doctrines, and where it is beneficial parallels and oppositions are displayed with similar trends or ideas.

Chapter II presents the context of the Reformed church and the reception of Karl Barth's theology. Since these issues are not generally known to the English reader more space is allocated to them than would otherwise have been the case. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the cultural awareness of a Reformed theology that wanted to serve the church in a minority situation. Barth himself, as a German speaking Swiss, was viewed through cultural lenses as we see when I trace the various patterns of the process of reception. For the reason of continuity and to provide a solid reference basis for later discussions, Chapter III is reserved for the task of sketching the development of Barth's thought from a dialectical phase towards a more Christ-centred position. It is important to follow this development for the sake of evaluating the impact that the specific readings of the doctrine of the Word of God and revelation in Transylvania had on different areas of dogma and practices. Such a study also points towards further possible developments of Hungarian theology drawing from the immense resources of Barthian thought. In Chapter IV, I present three major approaches to theological and ecclesiastical renewal in Transylvania in general and more specifically to Barth's

theology of the Word of God. There we will notice that these initial approaches gradually come closer to each other, influencing each other until the Transylvanian theologians reach a more homogenous approach.

It is an important fact of the reception of Barth that he was viewed not only through cultural lenses, but through Calvin as well. For this reason, before I begin looking at the shape that the theology of the Word of God took in Transylvania (in Chapters VI and VII) I make a comparative study of Barth and Calvin (in Chapter V) with reference to those dogmas of Barth that the Transylvanian theologians regarded as having a Calvinistic character and which emerged in the process of the reception of Karl Barth.

Sándor Tavaszy, a Reformed theologian and teacher of the twentieth century, played a prominent role in the reception and popularisation of Barth's thought in Transylvania. For this reason, a whole chapter (VI) is dedicated to his theological development and thought. Then in Chapter VII, I will examine the way in which different doctrines took shape in the works of Transylvanian theologians other than Tavaszy.

In Chapter VIII, I summarise the characteristics of the phenomenon of the reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania. In the context of the main issues that emerge from this study in Chapter IX prospectively I attempt to suggest a direction for articulating a theology of culture in present day Transylvania by the Reformed church along the line of Barth's theological development.

C. Sources

The sources I used in my research are primarily Hungarian Reformed sources from Transylvania that can be found in the library of the Reformed Theological Institute² in Kolozsvár.³ I have myself translated all the quotations from Hungarian or Romanian. The authors referred to are almost exclusively Reformed theologians who in the period of my study lived in Transylvania. I quote a limited number of non-Reformed or non-Transylvanian authors when they wrote about what happened in the Reformed church of Transylvania or when in one way or another they might have had an influence on the Reformed church-scene there.

It is important to note that some of the sources written in the period my work refers to, were published or republished in the 1990s. In the case of the works published after 1990, where it was possible, I mentioned the date when the manuscript was finalised. Again for better historical perspective I give the original publication date for Karl Barth's works translated in Hungarian and the first publication date of works where they are relevant for understanding in strait brackets.

I considered primary sources for the reception those works that were written by Transylvanians on Karl Barth and the effect of his theology on Transylvanian theology. Primary sources are also those works that are written about certain theological topics with reference to Barth's theology. Most of the primary sources are from the 1920s, 30s and 40s and a few from later decades. Secondary sources of the reception are those, which comment on what has been achieved by theologians reacting to Karl Barth's theology.

² Formerly it was the Reformed Theological Faculty. In the first years of Communist realignment the school was reorganised and served the Reformed, the Lutheran and the Unitarian churches in pastor training. See Nagy G 1995:325.

³ In the text of the thesis, localities are mentioned by their Hungarian name. For the Romanian equivalent of locality names see Table 1 in the Appendices.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THEIR SPECIFIC SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The historical sketch presented in this chapter concentrates on the first half of the twentieth century, with special reference to the minority situation of the Hungarians, which determines their whole life in Romania even today. The political and cultural setting created in the first half of the twentieth century was not only the context of church life and theological self-understanding, but also the major moulding factor of it. This chapter is justified by the fact that in Transylvania Barth's theology was viewed with an 'historic eye'; his message was evaluated against the historical background and experience of the Reformed church. At the same time the study of the church history of Transylvania reveals similarities with the general European situation.

A. The General Historical and Political Background

The goal of this subheading is to cast some light on how the fact that the Hungarians became a minority in Romania impacted their thinking and influenced the way the mission of the Reformed church was regarded.

The defeat of the Republican revolution and the independence war from Austria of 1848-49 established a new political scene in Central-Europe. After centuries of independence, Transylvania found itself part of Hungary and subsequently part of the

new power structure of the dualistic Austro-Hungarian Empire. The power balance in the empire favoured the Austrian domination, which was the cause of several liberation and emancipation movements among the nationalities of the empire.

The political and economic dispositions from Budapest, the centre of politics for Transylvania, in principle supported the minorities of Transylvania. In practice, however, unfavourable situations were created both for the Romanian and the German minorities. At the same time, the situation was unfavourable for the distinct historical Hungarian cultural and political institutions of Transylvania, too. The most important idea that emerged from the socio-political thought of those times was the formulation of the idea of the *united political nation* and the measures taken in favour of its realisation. The idea was to include all the national minorities in a single national state and to 'recognise their cultural and linguistic characteristics to the extent only that the historically formed Hungarian hegemony might not be threatened' (Köpeczi 1989:525). The Hungarian liberal government at the end of the nineteenth century, however, had no detailed policy on the nationalities and it was hoped that the nationality issue would be solved by an administration built on local autonomy. The result of the political failure that followed this political passivity resulted in the birth of the Romanian nationalist movement in Transylvania that created a long lasting ethnic tension between Hungarians and Romanians in the land.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Transylvanian Hungarian political elite that initially was against the Austro-Hungarian Dualism, became part of the political dualist system. Building on the idea of a united political nation the *dogma of everlasting presence* emerged, which reflected the understanding that Hungary and Transylvania would not regain their independence and that the breaking-up of the dualistic monarchy could not be envisaged.

The shock was enormous when subsequent events contradicted this dream. The role played by Hungary in World War I facilitated the victory of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania. In the second half of the war, when the defeat of the Hungarians and the Austrians could already be predicted, Romania gained hold of Transylvania in 1916 by military occupation. The status quo was justified when in 1918 at the Committal Meeting at Gyulafehérvár the union of Transylvania with Romania was declared. The Trianon Peace Treaty in 1920 sanctioned this political act. This treaty, however, 'practically created a greater tension in the Danube-basin than there was before the war, handing these countries over to the political interest of great powers. This fact had a decisive effect on Transylvania as well, after it became part of the new state-settings' (Köpeczi 1989:557).

1. Transylvania in the Bonds of a New State: 1918-1940

The distinctiveness of Transylvania in comparison to old Romania – apart from the difference of its economical and cultural level – was its ethnic make-up. According to the census in 1930 Transylvania had 5 584 363 inhabitants, of whom 57.8 per cent were Romanians, 24.4 per cent Hungarians and 9.8 per cent Saxons.¹

The change of dominion favoured the Romanians, and the Hungarians – for the first time in their history – were faced with the fact of living in a minority. The Romanian national leaders in their declaration at Gyulafehérvár promised substantial freedom for the minorities.² Romania, in 1919 took upon itself the obligation in international treaties that it would apply the rights of the nationalities in its

¹ See Table 2 in the Appendices for more detailed data and comparison with 1910.

² Quote from the Declaration: 'Absolute national freedom for the nationalities living with us. Each people has the right to use its language, to have its government and its jurisdiction in its own language with its own administration through persons from its own rank. In the legislative bodies, and the government of the, country the nationalities will be represented in proportion to their number' (Mikó 1941:265).

administration. These treaties prescribed 'equality before the law, free use of language, minority education, some degree of cultural autonomy for the Seklers³ (székely) and Saxons and authorised the minorities to seek legal remedy for their complaints at the League of the Nations' (Köpeczi 1989:586-87).

These promises, however, were not kept in Romania. The constitution of 1923 in principle stated equality before the law, but at the same time it declared Romania a national state, and did not fulfil the promises given to minorities in 1918. In modern Romania there always was a tension between the constitution, the international agreements and political practice. The situation of the Hungarian minority, due to the unfavourable economic and social trends and political discriminations deteriorated continually. After 1918, 200,000 Hungarians left Romania to settle in Hungary (Köpeczi 1989:587).

An outstanding example of the discriminatory policy was the *agrarian reform* in 1921 that hit mainly the Hungarian middle and high landowner classes and the churches. 'While the possessions of the Romanian churches increased, the Hungarian churches (Catholic and Reformed) lost 314,000 hectares, in spite of the fact that the income from their lands was traditionally used for cultural and education aims' (Köpeczi 1989:588). The life context of the Hungarian minority consisted in its struggle for survival. We need to consider this fact in relation to our study since the life and theology of the Reformed church was not only influenced by this context, but also determined by it. The curtailing of the rights of Hungarians was systematically applied by the Romanian authorities, against which the church consisted a refuge with its leaders that were the advocates of freedom.

³ Hungarian population in the far south-eastern corner of Transylvania living mostly in the Covasna and Harghita counties of present day Romania. They served the Hungarian Kingdom from the early Middle Ages by defending the border of the kingdom in return for certain privileges.

The most devastating effect was made by the attack on Hungarian education. After 1919, education in Hungarian was restricted to the denominational schools in spite of the fact that the agrarian reform took most of the resources away from the churches. The Franz Josef University established by the Hungarian administration in Kolozsvár was relocated to Hungary leaving Romania without any Hungarian higher education establishment (Zolnai 1940). Education in Hungarian language atrophied since the families that belonged to the Hungarian communities were not able to support the state education in Romanian which was financed from their own local taxes, and out of which their children did not profit, and at the same time to send their children to private or denominational schools with increasingly high fees. 'As the institutions of the Hungarian education, and indeed culture, concentrated in the hands of the churches, the role of the church in minority-life increased. The priests, especially the younger ones, in spite of the harassment of the authorities did much for the Hungarian culture in church associations' (Mikó 1941:161). In the light of these attempts, we see more clearly a renewed interest in culture on the part of the Hungarian Reformed church of Transylvania. It is also understandable that a major theological event, such as the reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania could not escape the cultural colouring and interference in the process. The issue of education was also a major question in the debate on the reception of dialectical theology in the 1930s, but the limits of this thesis do not permit a closer investigation of this issue.

The detriments suffered by Hungarians fuelled the idea of *revisionism*; a large section of the population hoped for a speedy revision of the Trianon borders. The older generation conceived the renewal of Transylvania only in terms of a *unified political nation*. At the same time, and in contrast to this idea, the intellectuals of the younger generation conceived the idea of so-called *Transylvanianism*. This idea is important for our study since it was embraced by those theologians who were involved in the

reception of Karl Barth's dialectical theology. Transylvanianism built on historical experience, and thought that Transylvania had a major role in promoting the peaceful cohabitation of nations; it looked for solutions to the minority problems in an emotional outreach to other nations. Hungarian writers became sensitive to social issues and sociological research came to be important in discovering the social situations of Hungarians both in cities and in rural areas.

By the end of the 1930s it became to be clear that the situation of the Hungarian minority did not depend solely on the internal political situation of Romania, but again depended on the interest-games of the great-powers. With the weakening of the League of the Nations and the strengthening of the German-Italian political axis the external political situation of Romania also weakened. Germany and Italy, the two strengthening powers of the period, gave in to Hungarian revisionist pressures, and also playing their own political game, annexed the North of Transylvania to Hungary on 30 August 1940 by the *Second Vienna Award* (see Map 2 in the Appendices).

2. During, and after World War II: 1940-1948

The Hungarians in Transylvania received the decision of the Award with both joy and sadness; after all a significant part of the Hungarian population was left under Romanian rule (Vásárhelyi 1940; Tavaszy 1940b). The Award brought changes only to a narrow sector of the Transylvanian Hungarian society and the four years of Hungarian administration in the North of Transylvania was too short to bring significant changes in the society. The Hungarian population of Transylvania, however, disliked the chauvinistic spirit of the military administration. The civil servants and officials, that had come from Hungary behaved arrogantly and harassed the political left that had gained increasing influence in Transylvania (Köpeczi 1989:5980). The natural resources

of Transylvania were exploited and the economy was set to sustain Hungary's military efforts.

The peace treaties after World War II reinforced the Trianon borders of Romania, so the North of Transylvania found itself in Romania again. From the 1940s onward the upsurge of the political left in Romania has begun. In 1948 Communists gained control over Romania. After an initial relative openness, Ceaușescu came to power in 1965, and a renewed nationalism became the central ideology of Romanian politics. The minorities and their churches in Romania had to face not only the difficult issue of being in minority but to take the challenge of an atheist ideology as well. The Communists managed – under the cover of a certain degree of religious liberty – to control the churches and to stress their social and cultural role to use them for their socio-political agenda. The minimalist Reformed church-life established after 1948, like of other churches indeed, seems very poor compared to the period between the Wars. István Tőkés called the earlier period one of fruitfulness and the later period that of 'lavishness', in which former treasures were wasted (Tőkés 1990:12-13). For this reason in this study of Karl Barth's reception in Transylvania I concentrate mainly on the period between the two great wars.

B. Church and Society in Transylvania

The specific political situation, as has been already mentioned, was a determining factor of Reformed church life in Transylvania and created a specific cultural context in which the Hungarian Reformed consciousness in Romania was expressed. 'Transylvanianism' was the ideology of the younger generation of Hungarians between the Wars.

1. Transylvanianism and a new Concept of the Nation

Transylvanianism – according to Dezső László writing in the 1930s – is the *worldview of the Hungarians in Transylvania*. As I mentioned above, the old generation thought in terms of a united political nation, and regarded political revisionism as the only means of solving the problem of the Hungarians. The new generation, however, prepossessed by the spirit of Transylvanianism proposed a reconciliation with the existing situation and seemed to find the solution in the integration into the Romanian society. László in a 1938 article noted (1997:124)⁴ in connection with its attempt that ‘the success of life-communities depends on the degree of realism with which it can face the circumambient world that threatens its existence’. He presents (1997:124-7) the features of Transylvanianism, as follows:

a. It is rooted in history but it consciously judges history. The historical consciousness of the Hungarians in Transylvania is stronger than that of Hungarians living in other lands since for a ‘century and a half, almost exclusively, the Transylvanian prince was the national Hungarian king’ in the time of the Turkish occupation.

b. It is open towards modern thought. In Transylvania modern ideas appeared earlier than in other parts of Central- and Eastern Europe. The Transylvanians, however, always assimilated and restated the new ideas ‘according to the interest present in this land’.

c. It seeks a broad horizon in spite of the narrowing existence of Transylvanians.

d. People in Transylvania look for and find a fellow-sufferer in nations beside them. The tension between the nationalities of this land was always instigated from

⁴ This collection published in 1997 contains articles from the inter-war period.

outside, by opportunist political forces. 'From the idea of Transylvanianism', says László 'follows the appreciation and esteem of other nations'.

e. Transylvanianism values spiritual elevation more than the material conditions of life. Since it was always short of material resources, in Transylvania people could easier escape materialism and consider 'the higher-rank facts and determination of life'. This outlook determines the role of the church as well. 'The being of the church', says László, 'nowhere was as integrated with the general life of the people as here'.

f. The society is more democratic here than in other lands. The wall dividing nationalities in Transylvania is smaller than the wall between those nations outside the Transylvanian context.

According to this positive almost ideal position, the propagation of straightforward nationalism 'would be equal with the signing of one's death sentence' (László 1997:125). Transylvanianism thought of itself as a specifically Transylvanian way of looking at things that has deep roots in the history of the land. Since the Transylvanian spirit aspires to cultural, but not political autonomy

one should not approach Transylvania with the general principles of a movement, but one must look to movements from a Transylvanian perspective. We are not supposed to be told what is good for Transylvania in a movement, but we should say what it is that we desire of it for Transylvania (László 1997:40).

This idea was emphatically expressed also by Makkai in connection with the reception of Barth's theology in Transylvania (see section IV.B) when he minimized Barth's importance for Transylvania and preferred thought and solutions that emerged from the Transylvanian life context. László links Transylvanianism with the Unitarian⁵ and the Reformed church, that are, beyond any doubt, Transylvanian phenomena. He,

⁵ The Unitarian church has historical roots in Transylvania from the time of the Reformation and it is the largest non-Trinitarian church in Europe.

however, thinks that 'among all the Hungarian church youth movements, as a matter of fact, the Reformed one is the most important...' (László 1997:41).

Transylvanianism shaped the spiritual façade of the Transylvanian youth in the interwar period relinquishing the idea of emigration and having a strong mission consciousness. The Transylvanian youth accepted the minority situation, education in a foreign language (Romanian) and thus made itself ready for embracing the Transylvanian destiny. 'We cannot save ourselves [from difficulties]', said László in 1930, 'without avoiding God's retribution, and go to a university in Hungary that promises freer and easier development and a higher career, purely from personal reasons' (László 1997:23). The mission consciousness in Transylvania, enhanced by belief in divine predestination, consisted in

the sincere knowledge of the past and the unfavourable image of the present situation, with a turning towards the possibilities of life in the future. Unlike those who think in terms of a unified political nation, the new Transylvanian spirit wanted to know, without any lies, the *whole area* of the Transylvanian past instead of the rosy and glorious *national history*. It searches the past hidden in the national tragedy; in historical figures it does not look for an ideal, but looks for the human, it does not glorify the past, but rather judges it (László 1997:23; Năstase and Salat 2003:142).

To create this spiritual mindset required a great deal of effort when in Hungary the revisionist spirit⁶ was in renewal and without any doubt had some Transylvanian followers as well. To counterbalance the revisionist spirit in Hungary, on the Romanian political scene the Anti-revisionist League was formed, that caused great turmoil in the political sphere of Transylvania (Mikó 1941:135).

From the vantage point of such an ideology, Dezső László, writing in the 1930s, finds that the Transylvanian destiny is not a curse but a blessing.⁷ It is a blessing that it

⁶ Refers to the desire to revise the decision of Trianon Peace Treaty, and annex Transylvania back to Hungary.

⁷ Zsolt Kozma (2005a:68-74) in 2005 revisits the idea that living in minority is a blessing. He however gives a more sociological analysis in the perspective of Romania joining the EU rather than a theological investigation.

can see Hungarian life and history unbiased and can prophetically warn the Hungarians to examine the authenticity of their national idea. In contrast to the Hungarians in Hungary, it is more costly for the Transylvanians to remain Hungarians. At the same time, the Transylvanian destiny enhances the reinterpretation of the democratic spirit when it is forced to turn openly towards the lower classes of the society, since the Hungarian middle and upper classes had been annihilated by the political changes. There was a hope in Transylvania that the federation of the European states would soon come when states would not oppose each other, but races would match their cultural and economic power. From their specific position, the Hungarians in Transylvania not only predict this fact, but also prepare themselves for it (László 1997:81-84).

This form of Transylvanianism was not unequivocally or universally accepted. The poets and writers in Transylvania also dealt with the issue. Endre Ady, one of the greatest Hungarian poets, considered that the root of the Hungarian problem was 'in their shared Eastern-Western origin'. László comments on Makkai's interpretation of Ady. Ady thought – said László – that at the buffer of East and West, Hungarians had lost their ancient eastern soul and could not take up the spirit of western consciousness: 'since they are not clear about their destiny they will fall out barren from the great sieve of time' (László 1997:105, Makkai 1927:21). The Hungarians in Transylvania share in the fate of all Hungarians.

László Németh, a writer from Hungary, spoke in the same pessimist tone. He said that 'independent Transylvanian princes burned out quickly, exhausting the Hungarians' and that by the turn of the century Transylvania could show up only a few great personalities attempting to achieve something with great difficulty in favour of the Hungarian minority (László 1997:106; Németh 2001:95-96).

This pessimistic view of the Hungarian culture was first spread through what was known as 'Herder's oracle'. Johann Gottfried von Herder,⁸ when analysing the concept of the political nation after the French revolution, stated that the final goal of the governing activity of the state was to form a united national state by means of both protection and coercion: the state wants to protect its integrity over against the attempt for independence of nationalities (Száráz 1988:209). Herder is supposed to have said about the Hungarians that 'they now live here in the middle of Slavs, Germans and other nations, as a minority of the population, but centuries later, perhaps, even their language will scarcely be found' (cited in Száráz 1988:211-12). His 'oracle' became well known among the Hungarian intellectuals.⁹

Bishop Sándor Makkai, who otherwise was a great figure of Transylvanianism, was also affected by this pessimism. When he resigned his office due to illness and exhaustion in 1936, he emigrated to Hungary causing disappointment to many, since he was regarded as the main exponent of the minority culture. In the 1930s he supported so much the originality of the Hungarian culture in Transylvania that he regarded unnecessary the reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania (see section IV.B). Makkai, however, published an article in 1937 in the *Láthatár* magazine in Hungary with the title '*It is not possible!*' [Nem lehet!], which was interpreted as a contradiction of 'his entire past when he pronounced the final word: it is not possible to live in a minority situation' (Mikó 1941:164). His article sparked an intensive debate in the press about Makkai and the future of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Some of the

⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), German poet, critic, theologian and philosopher, is best known for his concept of 'Volk' and is generally considered the father of ethnic nationalism based on cultural values. He wrote about the Hungarians in his work entitled *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1965. Reprint.

⁹ For a more positive appreciation of Herders' ideas on nation, and his inspiring effect in Central and Eastern Europe, see Gáll 1994:27ff.

leading intellectuals in Transylvania were disappointed and they saw in Makkai's position a betrayal of the spirit of Transylvanianism.¹⁰

Closer to the Reformed supporters of the Transylvanian spirit was Transylvanian writer Dezső Szabó. According to Dezső László, Szabó thought, that the 'root problem of the Hungarians is not in their destiny, but in the actual nation, and this is why he could not accept the final conclusion' that the Hungarian race, even in Transylvania, would be 'sentenced to death' as Ady did (László 1997:105). László agrees with Szabó and thinks that if a Hungarian finds that he is sinful, 'as a Christian he can speak about sin and the sinner as one being in the presence of God'. Moreover, if this happens, the grace of God intervenes – thus we can also speak about forgiveness and renewal (László 1997:105).

In this way in the inter-war period, the Hungarian national feeling, culture, the respect for tradition and Christian faith intermingled. This spirit gave birth to an ideology which on the one hand made possible a survival and continuity and on the other hand played an important role in the life of the Reformed church, and indeed, in the formulation of its theology as well.

2. Reformed Church life in the Twentieth Century Transylvania

The Reformed church of Transylvania in 1946 numbered about 700-800¹¹ thousand people with approximately 825 churches, 150 sister-churches and 400 diasporas, in 2 church districts: Transylvanian Church District (Kolozsvár) and Királyhágó Church District (Nagyvárad). The latter was formed in 1926 comprising the churches situated along the Romanian-Hungarian border, churches that broke away from a Hungarian

¹⁰ For the press debate, see Cseke and Gusztáv 1989.

¹¹ According to István Tőkés, a pastor and theologian, the statistics are not entirely reliable, but the census in 1946 gives us a general picture of the church in the first part of the twentieth century. According to Makkai (1931:360) the membership was 750 000.

church district in 1918 due to the change of country-borders (Tőkés 1990:17). The organisation of the Romanian Reformed Church is Synod-Presbyterian, but at the head of the church districts, there is a bishop. Although the bishop is considered to be only 'primus inter pares', his person has a decisive impact on the whole of the church.

Considering the time span of this research, for our purpose it is enough to refer to two of the bishops: Sándor Makkai and János Vásárhelyi. In Makkai's time of office the reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania began, and it was more or less finished in Vásárhelyi's time. The activities of the bishops and the issues raised in the time of their activity clearly mirror the life-situation of the whole church.

a. Sándor Makkai (1890-1951) and the Great Theological Turn

Bishop Sándor Makkai was one of the greatest personalities of Transylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. The scholarly processing of his entire life work is not yet done.¹² In this thesis, I can only refer to certain aspects of his personality and work that are important from the point of view of our study. Makkai's spiritual journey sheds light on an important fact, namely that a search similar to Barth's, independent of his influence, was discernible in Transylvania as well, bearing the specific marks of this context.

Between 1914 and 1917, Makkai was a professor at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár, between 1917 and 1918 he held the chair of pastoral theology in Sárospatak (Hungary), and between 1918 and 1926, he was professor of systematic theology at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár. Between 1921 and 1924, he was the director of the same school, and between 1926 and 1936, he was the bishop of the Transylvanian Church District. Makkai further developed the tradition, which

¹² Károly Fekete in the last 10 years wrote significantly about Makkai. The most important among his works is on Makkai's practical theology (Fekete 2001).

regarded the history of Transylvania and the life of the Reformed church as being in an intimate relation. Alongside his church activities, and in harmony with them, he developed a rich belles-lettres activity. In his writings he treated different aspects of Transylvanian history and made a stand on contemporary social issues. In 1936, he settled down in Hungary, where, before moving to Budapest, for a short time he taught practical theology in Debrecen. His public life continued in Hungary, but for the purpose of our study, we concentrate on the period when Makkai still lived in Transylvania.

Makkai's theological exploration is important not just because, due to his church position, he could promote the results of his search, but also because his theological journey reflects the theological search of the whole of Transylvanian Reformed church of his days. As a theological student in Kolozsvár, being brought up on rationalist and liberal environment, Makkai was not satisfied with the kind of theology that was taught at the Faculty. He was disillusioned, and his beliefs were shaken (Makkai 1990:17)¹³ becoming tired of the bible-criticism, psychology of religion and liberalism of his teachers. In this period, Makkai was thought that the object of theology is religion and not God, and that the right name of theology is 'study of religion' [vallástudomány]¹⁴ (Makkai 1990:27-28). His searching soul – like that of many of his contemporaries – wanted to be sure of the reality of God to whom the religious studies were referring.

László Ravasz, another great Transylvanian Reformed personality, had a decisive effect on Makkai as the one in whom he 'first saw the presence of evangelical faith' and for whom the practice and embrace of scholarship (history, psychology, philosophy) as

¹³ This is a post-mortem publication. The manuscript was signed by Makkai in 1944.

¹⁴ For the Hungarian term 'vallástudomány' (German equivalent of 'Religionsgeschichte') in English there are equivalents like 'history of religion', 'critical study of religion', 'religious studies' or 'science of religion'. In this thesis, I shall use 'study of religion' meaning the critical study of the religious phenomenon by historical, psychological and sociological methods.

a God given gift is only in the second place. This is how Makkai, who was sensitive to artistic forms, appreciated Ravasz's influence on his life: 'There you are! It is possible to speak about the hackneyed, boring, dead truth of religion so brilliantly, colourfully, freshly and full of life, only if somebody has the necessary conviction of faith and inclination towards artistic life-giving expression' (Makkai 1990:31).

In Makkai's case, as in Tavaszy's, the specific way of development led through 'value theology' (see section I.C.3), based on Karl Böhm's philosophy and on a traditional Calvinist theology of the Word. Value theology was a specific theological thinking of the Hungarian Reformed church in the first half of the twentieth century based on Karl Böhm's idealist philosophy of values. In the next section, we shall explore both this philosophy and the theology based on it.

Although, latter in his life, Makkai came under then influence of dialectical theology, he kept his interest in the study of religion. During his student years, another professor influenced his life – György Bartók and his view of dogmatics, who mediated Böhm's position (see Bartók 1911) to Makkai. Bartók influenced Makkai towards the study of religion and philosophy, but in a way that the study of these disciplines left a place for an objective knowledge of God in his thinking. Böhm's philosophy helped Makkai to see how 'faith and a self-conscious worldview' can be reconciled. This is what Makkai said about Böhm:

His philosophy points to the pinnacle of existence and value where stands the self-real and self-valuing Spirit in the light of its purity and freedom like the sum of truth, beauty and love. I think it is understandable that I saw in this philosophy a scientific way coming from human self-consciousness to break through to the God-Spirit, a way which leads directly to the most inner height and mystery of faith, for the grasping of which, like a blunderer, I came to study theology (Makkai 1990:36).

Thus, for Makkai, theology became a philosophy of faith on the basis of which he conceived the special task of the theologian in the world to be self-conscious service and the promoting of self-conscious faith.

A new impact on his life was made by the student evangelist John Mott¹⁵ when he visited Kolozsvár in 1909, whose 'moving testimony' – said Makkai – 'helped me to a more obedient study of Scripture'. Makkai was also influenced by the Christian student movement, which was refreshed by Mott's visit. At the same time, he disliked the pietistic leaders who worked with the Bethánia Society, or Christian Endeavour (Makkai 1990:37).¹⁶

Makkai's further theological development happened during his professorship at the Theological Faculty at Kolozsvár, when he came to be familiar with Calvin and the confessions of the church. This was the period of the formation of a Calvinist theological position characteristic of him. In terms of their content, for Makkai, Calvin's *Institutions* and the confessions of church agreed (Makkai 1990:93-4). From this point onwards he made Calvin's thoughts the backbone of his lectures. Nevertheless, he was continuously interested in the phenomenon of religion (Makkai 1990:94) as the titles of his writings from that period reflect.¹⁷ According to him the 'study of religion illustrates in various ways the most important momentum of the experience of faith: the deep discontent of man with himself, and the movement towards himself by the aid of superhuman reality' (Makkai 1990:82). Makkai interpreted religion not only as a human phenomenon, but also as the living communion of God and man. He conceived

¹⁵ John Raleigh Mott (May 25, 1865 – January 31, 1955) was a long-serving leader of the YMCA. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for his work in establishing and strengthening international Christian student organizations that worked to promote peace. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mott Accessed 25.01.2006. Mott had a positive influence on Barth, too. He detected a 'strength and concentration of religious experience' in him. Busch 1976:58.

¹⁶ Christian Endeavour was established by F. E. Clark, a Presbyterian minister from Portland as a Christian youth organisation. At its fiftieth anniversary it was active in 45 countries with more than 85,000 members. In Hungary in 1903 Aladár Szabó and István Kecskeméthy established Bethánia Society. They asked Christian Endeavour to receive Bethánia among their members. The aims of the society were the practice of Christian charity and to revive true Christian living. Under political pressure Bethánia ceased its activity in 1950 and was re-established in 1990 as Bethánia CE Association. Source: <http://www.parokia.net/template1.php?id=26>. Accessed 25.02.2006.

¹⁷ Here are some of his titles: *A keresztyén vallás filozófiája* [The Philosophy of Christian Religion] in 1918; *A vallás az emberiség életében* [Religion in the Life of Humanity] in 1923; *A vallás lényege és értéke* [The Essence and Value of Religion] in 1923.

Christian life as being the process whereby God lives in man, and through this relationship, man has an authentic life. When expressing the content of Christian religion he made use of the Bible, Calvin and the confessions, because 'a Christian is only a person who knows God through Jesus Christ'. Makkai therefore, before knowing about dialectical theology, arrived at Jesus Christ and the Word through a thoughtful consideration of religious phenomena. At this point natural theology lost its importance for Makkai, but not due to rejection of the human and natural, as in the case of early dialectical theology. Makkai, in his subsequent theological development came to see more clearly that 'what we can know about God, we possess through Jesus Christ, and in him we possess everything that is divine'. 'A person starting only from this faith-knowledge', he said, 'can reach the Christian knowledge of the world and life; it is not the investigation of the world and life that leads us to God' (Makkai 1990:91). Future scholarly research on Makkai's theological development, which cannot be done in the limit of this thesis, will certainly show the relationship of theology and philosophy in his thinking,¹⁸ and how this relationship affected his ministry. In this short sketch, it is only necessary to point to the fact that in the 1920s he confessed that

Christian philosophy of religion for me is not equal to systematic theology, that is instruction in Christian religion and ethics, but it is only a prolegomena to systematic theology. Its aim is to link the Christian worldview and life experience with the culture and to protect them from hostile spiritual trends. Systematic theology is the exposition of the content of Christian religion inside faith and its explanation based on the Scripture and confessions' (Makkai 1990:91).

For Makkai, unlike in the Barthian thinking, although philosophy of religion and dogmatics were separated, the existence of both was justified: the former having an

¹⁸ Károly Fekete attempted (2000:41-45) to outline how philosophical thinking impacted Makkai's theology in the 1920s. He observed the sporadic influence of some concept from Böhm's philosophy on theological terms without producing a theological system. Fekete concludes that the 'philosophy of religion stage' of Makkai's development from a theological perspective 'wanders away towards pantheism' and due to its 'naïve anthropology' does not consider seriously the fact of sin and tackles the divinization of man' (Fekete 2000:44).

apologetic the latter a pastoral role. This is similar to what we shall see in Sándor Tavaszy, who also thought that philosophy of religion has an important role in defining a Christian worldview (see VI.B.2.f).

When Makkai became a bishop, the pastoral issues became more important for him than theoretical questions. For this reason, I believe, dogmatic questions and the practical sides of Calvinism came to the fore. It is interesting to see, how personalities with a theoretic mind tend to draw on Calvin when they are faced with the challenge of constructive church ministries. Again, something similar to Makkai's experience happened to Tavaszy when he was appointed professor at the Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár (see VI.A.2). In 1923, when Tavaszy published his first account of dialectical theology, Makkai reached the following stage of his theological development.

Only the sinful man can meet the gracious God, while one who is satisfied with himself meets only his fate or destiny. This is not true only for persons, but it is a true judgement about churches and nations as well. God, who works for us from eternity... addresses us from the cross, in order to smash us and lift us up, that we might confess with obedience: This love is God, and this God is love. Without such personal experience there is no Christianity (Makkai 1990:92).

He sums up his new theological position in his book entitled *Self-conscious Calvinism* (Makkai 1926) in which he regards Calvinism as not more and not less than a consistently lived religion. This is why in his book he deals with issues like religion, Bible, confessions, theology, church, worldview, culture, and nation. In its content this book is close to Abraham Kuyper's position and fits into the neo-Calvinist renaissance that started in Holland in the nineteenth century.¹⁹

¹⁹ Its main representative, besides Kuyper was Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) who, although having a thorough knowledge of post-Calvinian theology, preferred to go back to Calvin himself. Kuyper, Bavinck and their successors at the Free University in Amsterdam established by Kuyper himself, promoted a modern version of Calvinist theology with a strong leaning towards the cultural importance of Christianity. In the Hungarian context, their thoughts inspired the so-called 'Historic Calvinism' promoted from Budapest by Jenő Sebestyén. I deal with different forms of Hungarian Calvinism in section four of this chapter.

For Makkai the discovery of Calvin, at least for the period when he lived in Transylvania, constituted a sufficient theological development without the need to embrace 'Historic Calvinism'. For Tavaszy, however, the turn towards Calvin was paralleled with an interest in Barth, but Makkai's interest in Barth was reduced since he could find a theology of the Word without Barth's contribution. A lecture delivered by Niebergall²⁰ provoked a moment of illumination in his soul. This inspiration, rather than a careful consideration of a certain 'system' helped him to see the importance of the theology of the Word.

[These words] affected me like a stone dropped into a crystal liquid: the content that was swirling, forming and pressing in on me, at once was packed into a regular, hard crystal block and like a certainty that was born with an admirable suddenness, the character of the Scripture as Word was lifted high... I saw at once the enormous abyss between God and man, and the embracing bridge of grace in Christ's presence, on to which by the hands of the church he leads us (Makkai 1990:95f.).

So when Makkai began his work as a bishop in 1926, he had a serious appreciation of the Word of God²¹ and had already seriously explored a kind of dialectic between God and men. In many respects he agreed with the theological position of those who filtered their theological thinking through the Barthian dialectical theology. But his office laid a heavy burden on him and for this reason he could not keep himself updated with recent theological development concerning dialectical theology and with the new generation of theologians promoting it in Transylvania. This is how Makkai evaluates the clash between them and himself:

In the theological renewal proclaimed by them, on the one hand I could not see much of a new thing, since in our common struggle for a living church many features had been clarified, and even became generally known, and now they attempted to rise them again in a new package under the name of dialectical theology. On the other hand I also saw that, according to the good old Hungarian formula, they admired and praised something in the life of other nations, as if an unknown truth, whose ancient

²⁰ A German practical theologian highly respected in Transylvania at that time.

²¹ For his theology of the Word see section IV.B.

Hungarian roots dwindle to nothing in the waste-land of forgetfulness (Makkai 1990:116).

Besides issues related to principles the tension regarding dialectical theology was also fuelled by personal ambitions. Makkai felt a blow to his self-respect because he thought that the new trend (dialectical theology) unduly appropriated for itself the truths that were already known to him (Adorjáni 1996:218). Makkai also opposed the fact that the representatives of dialectical theology turned against teaching topics related to study of religion in theological education. His appreciation for the study of religion did not change and he thought it to be an important tool in making faith self-conscientious. Makkai wanted to promote a so-called *practical dogmatics*, which could exist parallel to, but distinct from, the study of religion. Practical dogmatics would exist as a confessional and pastoral discipline 'with the real aim to lead pastoral work, to inseminate and feed the church in building up souls and so be active for the education of the church members (Makkai 1990:94).

The fact that Makkai regarded Calvinism a religion and considered that the study of religion can contribute to making faith conscientious indicates that his concept of religion was different from what we know from the representatives of dialectical theology. For Makkai, like for other Transylvanian theologians such as Borbáth (see VII.B.1.a), religion had a positive meaning denoting the living out of the human response to God's revelation. The different understanding of religion might have been one of the reasons why Makkai could not embrace dialectical theology wholeheartedly and saw it culturally irrelevant to the Transylvanian situation.

The generations of dialectical theologians in Transylvania wanted to surpass the dichotomy between the study of religion and theological education that was not a real dichotomy for Makkai. To put aside the study of religion was an important issue for the dialectical theologians but 'a non essential' matter for Makkai. At the theological

conference in Nagyenyed in 1930 Makkai's position was that the life of the confessional church in Transylvania compared with dialectical theology 'in many areas is more advanced than this foreign teaching and in other areas, due to its specificity, this teaching cannot be applied to it' (Makkai 1990:117). After about four years, the tension subsided, and Makkai understood more of dialectical theology. He thought that his friends also 'were more involved in the real life of the Hungarian Reformed church in Transylvania and the exaggeration and misunderstandings due to human frailties were healed' (Makkai 1990:117).

Makkai like other theologians regarded the conversion to the theology of the Word in Transylvania as *the great theological turn* of Reformed theology; he partly advocated and partly criticised it. For him the theology of the Word is this: 'Word, faith and church couple together inseparably in a single chain. The Word sounds only in the church and only for faith and theology helps those who proclaim the Word to be aware of the faith of the living church that they might serve the Word better' (Makkai 1990:117). This is how close Makkai came to the kind of theology Sándor Tavaszy and his colleagues were embraced under Barth's influence. This theology was the position from which he acted as bishop for ten years.

Makkai's work in the church was driven by two major principles that emerged in his theological thinking: 1) the church in the specific Transylvanian context should become a spiritual power ('the church has to be church'), and 2) in order to reach this objective a special emphasis has to be put on home mission (*belmisszió*). The Transylvanian reformed church, thought Makkai, is facing the temptation to be regarded as a political instrument and not to be judged by the measure of the gospel. Makkai extended the spirit of Transylvanianism to the life of the church as well. He wrote that, due to the Romanian agrarian reform and education policy, the institutions of the church were broken in such a way that it had become clear to the leaders of the church that they

needed to renounce all kind of earthly empire and needed to give themselves wholly to the reign of the Holy Spirit. This did not mean for Makkai to turn away from the cultivation of culture since he thought that the church as a spiritual power, and only that, would be able to keep the nation faithful to its Hungarianness, in its national culture, social unity and in its economic existence. The spiritual church is able to cultivate a spiritual nation out of a political one and to create a spiritual empire within its community.

In his *Revision of Ourselves* (1926) Makkai outlined the concept of a 'spiritual nation'. In order that the Hungarian minority might become a 'spiritual nation', it needs to reject all resentment and needs to cleanse the remembrance of the past of all prejudices. The past is neither bad, nor good, but has both elements in it. If there is a historical sin of the nation, that is the refusal to live under spiritual leadership and the preference for a leadership based on ancestry and wealth. This is the reason why the Hungarian nation 'became incapable of the only way of life possible for a small nation reaching a state of confrontation, namely the way of a flexible intellectual life, receptivity, progressivism and aspiration towards universality' (Makkai 2003[1931]:146). Makkai made an appeal to repentance, 'which is not the shame of a nation, but its glory and strength'. Like Dezső László, Makkai, too, regarded the minority status as a blessing and not an impediment in comparison with living in majority. Makkai thought that the only way of conservation of the Hungarians in Transylvania in the form of a 'spiritual nation' with strong spiritual and moral life based on its own national tradition developed independently, but at the same time in relation with the given cultural context. Although he conceived a spiritual church in a spiritual nation, the characteristics of the spiritual nation are not strictly religious or Christian, but are cultural values such as the 'ideas, work and the character of big personalities of

the Hungarian past in the area of science literature and arts, and ethical ideas for understanding life and tradition' (Makkai 2003[1931]:151; Kozma Zs 2001:105ff.).

In his view, as Kozma rightly pointed out, the spiritual church is not the final destination. God wants to establish a 'world order of souls', the final goal of which is the sanctification of the whole world. Makkai is convinced that God will create this order out of the 'types of national spirit'. For this reason, declares Makkai (1926:34, 65), national churches have a special role in the accomplishment of God's Kingdom (Kozma Zs 2001:107).

This magnificent vision of cultural Protestantism is not emerging from a secular understanding, but from a specific interpretation of value provided by Karl Böhm's idealism. As we shall see below, the supreme value for Böhm was the spirit that manifested universally, conferring value on the culture in which it appeared. Makkai equated this spirit with God, the absolute Spirit, so in his view the cultural values he referred to are in fact God's manifestations in culture.

Makkai's Transylvanianism is also reflected in his larger literary activity. As a member the *Erdélyi Helikon* – a Transylvanian literary society – he took part in the debates about public and cultural issues related to the Hungarian minority.²² Two of his works *The Destiny of the Hungarian Tree* [1927] and *Revision of Ourselves* [1931] prompted a significant political and literary debate. The message of the essays was to show the need for a 'critical love of the nation and consequently to recognise our national sins; we need to re-evaluate our past, spirituality, culture in every respect'. Only this way is possible to replace the lost earthly empire with an empire of spirit and

²² His major titles in this area are *Magyar fa sorsa – A vádlott Ady költészete* [The Destiny of the Hungarian Tree – The Poetry of the Accused Ady] in 1927; *Egyedül* [Alone] in 1929; *Magunk revíziója* [Revision of Ourselves] in 1931; *Erdélyi szemmel* [With Transylvanian Eyes] in 1933.

truth, and the only way for survival of a people living in minority is the way of spiritual and cultural greatness (Makkai 1990:115).

The way in which Makkai's theological position developed, and his practical church ministry faithfully reflect those changes that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s in the life of the Reformed Church in Transylvania as a context for the reception of Karl Barth's dialectical theology.

b. János Vásárhelyi (1888-1960) and the 'Years of Lavishness'

During the office years of bishop János Vásárhelyi (1936-1960) the image of the Reformed Church, due to the specific historical situation showed a different appearance from that of the previous period. After his election, some quiet years followed in the life of the church, which were sadly ended by turbulent times not only for the Reformed Church, but also for the whole country: World War II, the Second Vienna Award, reinstalling the Romanian regime and the emergence of Communism. According to Tavaszy, 'János Vásárhelyi first of all was a pastoral character... God has blessed him to fulfil this ministry not only with the power of speech, but with the charisma of preaching as well' (Tavaszy 1936e:290). Although in the last part of his life he sympathised with dialectical theology, this was never reflected in his thinking or the way he preached (Nagy L 1995:15).

Vásárhelyi's theological development also began from liberalism and reached a kind of confessional Calvinism. According to Makkai, Vásárhelyi's preaching in 1925 'was light and clear, rich in external illustrations, emotional... mostly related to the world of thought of liberal theology' (Makkai 1925:422). According to Geréb, however, even his earlier sermons did not lack the confessional element and his 'liberalism consisted only in the fact that the comforting and moralist element was preponderant in them' (Geréb P 1956:190).

Vásárhelyi too, became familiar with the confessions and the writings of the Reformers in the first part of the 1920s. He was actually pushed in this direction by the reception of dialectical theology. Like Makkai, he also emphasised that 'we cannot just take over the ready answers of others. We, Hungarian Reformed people, need to fight our own battle to know the truth of the Word, and in our own situation, we need to find the answers for ourselves' (Geréb P 1956:190). This consideration of the cultural situation in connection to the life and theology of the church, however, did not emerge from a deep intellectual and theological study, as in Makkai's case, but rather from a pastoral insight and from a sense of national distinctiveness.

Barth's visit to Transylvania took place in the first year of his office. Vásárhelyi greeted him with great respect and in his speech he recognised Barth's impact on the life and theology of the Reformed church in Transylvania (Tavaszy 1936d:436). His gesture signified that the representatives of dialectical theology were officially recognised by the church, but did not mean that Vásárhelyi became one of them. He in fact did not anchor himself in any theological trend, but 'he kept whatever he considered good from liberal theology and cultural Protestantism, even after he was introduced to the confessions. He adopted an eclectic approach to theology that created tensions in his *system*, which he could not release' (Geréb P 1956:190-91).

He applied the standpoint of confessional theology in his sermons and expanded it in his commentaries on the confessions. In these commentaries, he stood for a Reformed consciousness and emphasised the existential importance of faith in life. He bore the signs of self-conscious Calvinism and cultural Protestantism and rejected all kind of rationalism and one-sided pietism (Nagy 1995:16). Under the influence of the reception process of the dialectical theology, he broke with liberalism. Nevertheless, this break, according to Tőkés 'did not mean to him a new spiritual-ethical renewal that was represented by the theology professors... he accepted the idea of renewal, but he did not

draw its consequences for personal piety... he advocated an attitude free from liberalism, but due to its inward character of spirituality he did not practised an evangelical attitude' (Tőkés 1997:229). His spirituality had the character of a 'people's church' and that of a 'sound Calvinist', but 'not in the sense of Calvin's church in Geneva, but in the sense that Calvin's spirit was contextualised in Transylvania' (Tőkés 1997:229). Dialectical theology and the spirituality advocated by it did not win out in the life of the leader of the church, and neither could the reform-attempts that had begun in the previous period become widespread movements.

Bishop Vásárhelyi was known as the servant of all 'authorities' regardless of their nature: Romanian or Hungarian, nationalist or Communist. He thought this was the best way to serve his church. In the first years of his office (1936-1940), he did not pay serious attention to the tragic destiny of the Hungarians. He understood the message of Makkai's *It is not possible!*, but he did not accept it for himself (Tőkés 1997:226). Vásárhelyi was less interested in 'Transylvanianism' than in being a 'real-politician' who fights for the survival of his church and fellow nationals. In this period, he believed that the reconciliation between Romanians and Hungarians would lead to a good result, but he also emphasised that the right of both nations needed to be considered. During the period following the Second Vienna Award, he was considerate towards both the Catholic and the Orthodox churches. He thought that 'in this corner of Europe both the Romanians and the Hungarians are without brothers or sisters' (Tőkés 1997:227).

His program as bishop was also pragmatic. His main concerns were the local churches and the denominational schools (Vásárhelyi 1937:11-24). The pastoral character of Vásárhelyi's work was pre-signalled by his visit abroad in his early years as a pastor. On his study-tour he made after his graduation in Kolozsvár, for half a year he was not interested in scholarly theology or psychology, as for example Sándor Tavaszy

or Lajos Imre, but he tried to understand the life of the churches and their social context. He therefore fulfilled faithfully his role as the pastor and administrator of the church.

The theological work in the church began to decline in the 1940s and 1950s and continued declining during the communist regime that was installed after 1948. The reason for this can be found in the political situation of the time. Tamás Juhász quotes (2002:237) Zsolt Kozma remarking that in a period of 23 years of Communist dictatorship not a single original theological work was published and in the last twenty years only two or three per year. The reception of dialectical theology was more intense in the 1930s and in the following years gradually subsided. In the 1960s and 1980s some studies were published about Barth, but these were mainly about the achievements of the first generation of dialectical theologians. The communist era faced the Reformed Church in Romania with new and hard challenges.

C. Theological Trends in the Reformed Church in Transylvania

The topic of our thesis requires having a glimpse of the trends of Protestant theology in Transylvania in the first part of the twentieth century. The ideas of revelation and of the Word of God within these trends give us an idea about the background against which Barth's theology was received, and at the same time will give us the possibility of evaluating the measure of the shift that happened in theological thinking.

The period of our study has been characterised by changes and transitions and the position of individual theologians were in transition, too. When we mention 'periods' or 'trends' in theological thinking, we show, in fact, the major orientations, which were emphasised at certain moments in time in the Reformed church. The line of theological development in Transylvania, as indeed in Hungary, was from liberalism through one form or other of (revived) Calvinism to the theology of the Word of God. Theological

development followed a common track in Transylvania and Hungary until 1920, while they formed a single administrative unit, although Transylvania always had its regional distinctiveness. After the Trianon Treaty, due to Transylvania's union with Romania, the theological development of Transylvania and Hungary were characterised by accentuated differences.

The period of our study has been variously subdivided by different authors, giving more or less importance to different trends and movements (Makkai 1925:116ff.; Koncz 1942:24ff.; Bartha and Makkai L 1983:155-187, 537-381). Paying attention to the situation in Transylvania and the goal of this study, I point out those trends and movements that were characteristic of Transylvania in the first half of the twentieth century.

1. Liberal Theology

In Transylvania,²³ this trend, which was regarded as 'new' and 'modern', appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the incursion into theology of the 'scientific spirit' of the day. This scientific spirit was in fact the resurgence and implementation of German idealism. Hungarian and foreign liberalism is identical in content (Koncz 1942:72). Nevertheless, we cannot speak of a slavish imitation since we observe some independent thinking in Transylvania, both in terms of individual theologians and in terms of development of value theology based on Böhm's philosophy.

The main representative of theological liberalism in Transylvania was Ödön Kovács (1844-1895), a former student in Leyden, Holland, a close follower of the

²³ There were three major centres of theological liberalism among Hungarians and they were formed around important centres of theological education: Budapest, Sárospatak and Nagyenyed. These schools were similar in approach and in content of their theology. Our focus is the Transylvanian group from Nagyenyed.

Dutch Scholten and the Tübingen School (Antal 1995:33-36). The main institutional propagator of the 'new' theology was the Reformed College in Nagyenyed. This ancient Hungarian school was given university status in 1622 by Prince Gábor Bethlen (1580-1629)²⁴ and was until the twentieth century the very centre of Transylvanian culture and Protestant education. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Reformed Church moved the training of pastors to Kolozsvár when the Theological Faculty was established there as part of the recently founded Franz Josef University. The move resulted in the ending of theological training at Nagyenyed and in the weakening of the impact of liberalism in pastoral training. The trend at the new Faculty turned in a different direction. The representatives of liberal theology were dropping out, and among the faculty, there were new people with new vision. The theological profile of the twentieth century Reformed Church in Transylvania was determined by the Theological Faculty through the activity of its professors (Kozma Zs 1996:5-26 and Nagy G 1995:9-24).²⁵ The personal constitution of professors conferred a particular colour on the Faculty. Out of the five professors, three came from places that belonged more specifically to Hungary. Two of those who came from Hungary, Kenessey and Kecskeméthy, were promoters of a personal piety. Pokoly, although theologically expressing liberal views, sympathised with pietist practices.

²⁴ In its period of independence, Transylvania was ruled by princes. Gábor Bethlen, the greatest of them was a guardian of education and religious freedom. He transformed Transylvania into a land of religious freedom, while the rest of Europe was devastated by religious wars.

²⁵ The Theological Faculty started in 1895 with five professors. *Béla Kenessey* came to the chair of the Old and New Testament history. Previously he was a professor in Budapest and he became the first dean of the Faculty. *Albert Molnár*, a pastor from Marosvásárhely studied in Germany and Holland. He took the chair of practical theology since he was a very good orator. Dogmatics was taught by *Károly Nagy* a former pastor and professor from Nagyenyed. He was a liberal, but interested in Calvin, too. *István Kecskeméthy* taught Old Testament exegesis, a former pastor from Hungary who was an excellent biblical linguist. *József Pokoly* took the chair of Church History, a former pastor in Hungary, and the private teacher for the children of Kálmán Tisza, prime minister of Hungary (Kozma Zs 1996:25).

a. Theological Romanticism

In Hungarian Protestant church history, we cannot consider theological romanticism – understood as the close following of Schleiermacher's thought – apart from liberal theology. The reason for this, on the one hand, was the lack of theologians in Transylvania in whose thought romantic theology could have been found in a pure form. Although Schleiermacher's influence could be felt in Transylvania until World War I, it was mixed with the influence of other thought. On the other hand, romantic theology cannot be regarded as an independent theological trend in Hungarian theology, but only as a colouring of a fully developed liberalism (Koncz 1942:56). The influence of romantic theology in Transylvania was rather felt in emotional preaching practiced even to the middle of the twentieth century.

Schleiermacher's theological influence can be best felt in the eclectic theology of Károly Nagy.²⁶ He follows Schleiermacher in his definition of dogmatics. He regarded dogmatics as a descriptive discipline, since it tells us what it is in the church and not what it should be; dogmatics is not about dogmas, but it describes a faith, that although in touch with the past, is basically a continuously developing feeling or conviction. Doctrines like 'predestination, Adam's sin, Christ's atonement, Trinity, dual nature of Christ' – says Nagy, not necessarily following Schleiermacher – 'are almost forgotten in the public opinion of our church'. According to Nagy this is due not to unbelief, but to the 'careful study of faith and scripture' (Nagy K 1900:8f.). He derives faith from the general phenomenon of religion, which for him, as for Schleiermacher, originates in the relationship of the finite and infinite taken up into the human consciousness. The root of religion is in the pious feeling, but it is more than that: it should pass into knowledge and action (Nagy K 1900:62).

²⁶ Károly Nagy was a pastor in Nagyenyed and later became professor of systematic theology at the Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár. He served as bishop between 1918 and 1926.

About revelation and religion, he says that they are in an interdependent relationship. Religious feeling as a subjective phenomenon presupposes its objective bases, the reality of the object of religion. God's objectivity is grounded in the fact that he becomes the object of faith and enters into the religious consciousness. In this way revelation can be considered the objective basis of religion (man's relation to God). 'The lasting value of the belief in revelation' – says Nagy in tune with Schleiermacher – 'consists in the fact that God as personal spirit is in immediate relationship with the human spirit and reveals himself in the human spirit' (Nagy K 1900:74f.). We see that revelation conceived as a continuous divine influence on humans, grants a large space for a positive understanding of history and culture in which the spirit works through different manifestations of the culture. For Nagy natural theology is not yet the problem that it became to dialectical theologians who had a different view of revelation.

In the reception of Karl Barth's theology in Transylvania Nagy was not criticised openly for his views, but Schleiermacher's position often was. This critique, however, can be extended to Nagy as well.

b. The Characteristics of Hungarian Liberalism

(i.) Theological liberalism was in touch with *national feelings*, since it sympathised with the evolution of the new political liberalism of the day. The aim of Hungarian theological liberalism was to unite into a higher unity the antagonism of orthodoxy, rationalism and pietism. In opposition to the first two elements and in harmony with the third, liberalism affirms that religion is neither doctrine nor deed, but is a disposition, an emotional reality. Yet in distinction from pietism, liberalism wants to investigate emotional realities with scientific methods and wants to reach to the 'pure spirit of religion'. In the Transylvanian debate on liberalism a difference was not always made between the pietistic and liberal interpretation of religious experience. For this reason,

pietism was judged from the same perspective as the anthropocentric feeling of absolute dependence promoted by liberal theology.

(ii.) Transylvanian liberalism, like theological liberalism in general, emphasised *the role of religion in culture*. For the interest of liberalism in culture, it was important to harmonise religion with the ruling scientific worldview. As we shall see in our study, the theologians in Transylvania tended to work with the issue of a worldview, even when new theological trends such as Calvinism or dialectical theology made their influence felt. In the period of liberal theology the concept of religion as a worldview – in the common understanding – led to the replacement of theology with the ‘study of religion’, and indeed this was the position of many theologians such as Sándor Tavaszy (see section VI.A.1). Worldview and culture are in close relationship since worldview emerges from the scientific study of human spirit and its manifestation in culture. This heritage of classical liberalism was reiterated by value theology in which value was the manifestation of the spirit in culture. Total replacement, however, was not generally regarded as necessary. Ödön Kovács, the most important liberal theologian in Transylvania said that the study of religion could not replace theology since ‘the object of the study of religion is religion itself, which is discussed as a psychological phenomenon. In the forefront of theology, however, is God, and it is not possible to interchange the two since the study of religion does not exhaust the concept of scientific theology’ (Antal 1995:48). In his apprehension, Christian theology, as an independent discipline, is the sum of all those disciplines, which are related to Christianity, salvation and the Kingdom of God.

In its pursuit of a ‘scientific worldview’, liberalism opened theology up for rational investigation and in it scientific knowledge and religion came together into an organic and coherent unity. In its conception true religion became man’s possession through scientific method, since ‘the drive for science is essential to the soul’, and for

this reason 'one is not obliged to believe what the mind cannot conceive' (Ballagi 1848:365). Scientific philosophising became the criteria of true religion and in this way religion came into inner relationship with the view of idealism about knowledge, and with the worldview emerging from such knowledge. For example, says Koncz (1942:80) that Gusztáv Nagy thought that 'religion without knowledge is not only impossible, but never existed without it... and it is not imaginable without it. Religion is a peaceful and happy mental state (lelki állapot) based on a certain worldview that is manifested in facts adequate to itself'. The 'happy mental state' for Nagy – comments Koncz – is not the same as Schleiermacher's religious feeling: 'conviction (faith as *they* say) does not emerge from feelings, but vice versa; conviction gives birth, feeds and increases religious feeling' (Koncz 1942:80). 'Knowledge' in this context does not refer to the old doctrines, but to the rejection of them.

(iii.) Liberalism supplemented rational-belief in the interpretation of religion with *a strong emphasis on ethics* to keep religion in touch with life. Thus, ethics becomes the second pillar of religion besides the rational and theoretic justification of it. Ethical theory, however, could not release religion from the grasp of scientific faith. According to Ödön Kovács 'religion, in fact, lives in the ethical life'. Moral life is guided by 'God-consciousness', which resides in the moral constitution of human beings. Nevertheless, the moral consciousness is linked to facts of rationality, since, as Kovács put it, 'our moral laws are not in contradiction with our knowledge' (Kovács Ö 1871:22). In the development of an ethical theory, moral behaviour is related to the spirit's level of development. 'The only morally free person is the one who has reached that phase of development of the spirit, where the measure of the will and action is the recognition of the truth and good (Koncz 1942:82).' Transylvania liberals were confident that a man with high spiritual capacity could not do evil, not because he does not want it, but because he cannot want it.

(iv.) Rational faith and moral behaviour were brought into a synthesis and thus a *general spiritual attitude* was achieved. Religion was considered emerging from the multifaceted activity of the human spirit. All religions were considered true, as far they are in harmony with the totality of spiritual qualities of the individual. 'Without religion there is no spiritual life', since 'religion is an idea that embraces the entire human universe, it is the strongest and most universal among all the ideas that govern spiritual life' (Koncz in 1942:83).

2. Transylvanian Value Theology

Sándor Makkai thought that the theological position called 'value theology' was born out of the recognition that neither theology based on personal and practical piety, nor scientific theology based on a worldview concept are enough on their own. The two have to be brought into a unity where personal and practical Christianity and worldview-consciousness meet without any of them losing their validity (Makkai 1925:250). From Makkai's perspective, 'value theology' can be considered a kind of *mediating theology* between a form of liberalism and a more conservative position, even towards a theology of the Word.

The theoretical basis of what is called 'Transylvanian value theology' was laid on the neo-Kantian philosophy of Karl Böhm. For this reason, I rank it with liberal theology, in spite of having some constructive tendencies on the life of the church.

a. Karl Böhm's Objective Idealism

Karl Böhm (1846-1911) was born in Besztercebánya (Banska Bystrica, now in Slovakia). He studied theology, but later abandoned it and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the study philosophy. When he finished his theological training in

Pozsony (Bratislava), he went to study philosophy in Göttingen (1867-69) and in Tübingen (1869).

Böhm was the founder of the *Kolozsvár School* (kolozsvári iskola) which impacted mostly on the Protestant theologians in Kolozsvár and in this way its influence was felt more in theology than in the further development of philosophical studies (Böhm 2003[1883]:vi). From the group of Böhm's disciples only two – György Bartók and Béla Tankó – became philosophers; the rest took important church positions, mainly in the Reformed church.

Böhm's philosophical system is published in a six-volume work entitled *Ember és világa* [Man and his World].²⁷ When the first volumes of this work appeared, he still lived in Budapest; in Kolozsvár, he published only the third volume.

Since Böhm was claimed to provide the philosophical background for the academic Protestant theology in Transylvania in the first part of the twentieth century, we can see the importance of neo-Kantian philosophy, both in connection with Barth (see section III.A.2 of this thesis) and in connection with the Transylvanian theologians. While Barth distanced himself from neo-Kantian idealism, as we shall see below, the ambivalent attitude of the Transylvanians towards this philosophy was a barrier in the reception of the Barthian theology in Transylvania limiting its renewing power in the church.

Böhm's philosophical investigation starts from the area of epistemology and has a transcendental and subjective character borrowed from Kant.²⁸ For Böhm the starting point of philosophy is the self and its inner state. Bartók sums up well Böhm's anti-

²⁷ Only the first three appeared in his lifetime, the fourth was ready in manuscript form by his death and M. György Bartók his disciple published it later. The last two volumes were edited from lecture notes and published by the same Bartók.

²⁸ The presentation of Böhm's entire system stands outside the purpose of this thesis. We refer only to those thoughts of his philosophy, which can be related directly or indirectly to theology – or they are necessary for understanding those ideas that have theological implications.

realist approach:

Objects independent of us are not given to our knowledge, and in fact, we know only what we have created, what we are able to mould into our forms. Consecutively the object of our knowledge is the meaning of phenomena, their causal relatedness and their relations in space and time... everything that metaphysics imagines as being beyond the phenomena will remain unknown (Bartók 2003[1925]:20).

According to Böhm, the major question of philosophy is not about the way we know the external world to us, but the way our knowledge corresponds to the world. He thinks that the answer is found in the self: we know through the senses and through thinking. Through the senses, the image of the known object is created in us. This image, according to Böhm, psychologically is subjective (it is created by the self), but logically is objective (is created under the impact of the object). It is important to note, that for Böhm, the objectivity of the image of the object known does not mean conformity to the object, but only the fact that the image is created under the 'impact of the object'. The image is not created by self-consciousness, but it emerges in it through unconscious necessity. 'Knowledge' – said Böhm – 'is the conscious repetition of what spirit creates in form of an unconscious act' (Böhm 2003[1883]:8).

Dealing with the life of the spirit²⁹ Böhm emphasises that spirit, as self-positing, affirms itself, and through its evolution sustains itself. For this reason, he conceives spirit in a Hegelian way, as an all-purposeful-act, in which spirit realizes itself. When the act of the spirit reaches its goal the *sense of contentment* appears, a sense that governs all psychological processes.

The discussion about the ultimate functions of the spirit, especially the study of its movement, led Böhm to the idea that essence is of spiritual nature; thus, he equated world and spirit. He reached this idea by saying that the existing object of knowledge does not exist only in an abstract way, but has a meaning for us. Its meaning, however,

²⁹ In the second volume of *Man and his World*, published in Budapest in 1892.

is conditioned by *essence* and *act* that are ultimate categories of the spirit alongside causal relation, time and space. Böhm asserted essence in connection with every object of knowledge since 'essence is that invariable formal category, which is hidden in the effect of the object on us and what our reason finds unchanging in existence (being)' (Böhm 2003[1883]:91).

The study of the life of the spirit took Böhm further from epistemology and opened up for him the world of ontology and deontology. He came to see

more clearly that the 'vera imago mundi' is an unachievable illusion both in its extension and in its content. The only way the world appears to us is in the *general forms of the human spirit*, the content of which [world image] also emerges from the same spirit. For this reason I became interested more in the *artist* in man, who creates the world from his own content and in his own form (Böhm 1906:iii).

Böhm also realized the importance of what humans *create* in the world with their own strength. Böhm is more interested 'in this, categorically more important part of the world', than what is already 'there', since 'in the former we also take part in the work of the eternal life, and weave into its grand tissue our humble threads, but which are, nevertheless, indispensable for the existence of the world'. Over against the given world humans need to accomplish the *required* world (τὸ δεόν), that appears as an equal factor over against the given world. Böhm said in this context: 'There [in the *given*] we are hustled wildly and crudely – here [in the *required*] we validate our own strength in order to reject and conquer the brute force of the physis' (Böhm 1906:iv). In this way, Böhm arrives to the second branch of his philosophy, besides ontology, which is deontology. The two branches – both of them being metaphysical disciplines, said Böhm – are linked together by the activity of the self. 'The self develops from itself the threads of the given' – said Böhm – 'that circumscribe the past and from it also those glittering strings originate which are called to build up our future. The activity by which the self manifested itself in the past and manifests itself in the future is the root of origin

of the worldview. Ontology and deontology (the two metaphysical disciplines) can be united in one hyper-metaphysical concept, in the self-assertion of the self that is the concept of projection. On this depend the two 'semi-globe' of philosophy: the *image of the given world* (ontology) and the *ideal of the required world* (deontology)' (Böhm 1906:vii).

In his deontological investigation, Böhm searched for the absolute value. He thought that what we regard as value is in fact our image, therefore our creation, into which we instil the characteristics of value. Valuing is not arbitrary, and for this reason, it is not subjective either; value belongs with objective necessity to the valued object. Since the self creates and values the image of the object, creation and evaluation cannot be separated from each other. The self is that which brings value into and recognises value in the image. The consequence of this – said Böhm – is that the very place where valuing and the recognition of value coincide is also the rooting place of the different values, but at the same time, it coincides with the common centre of ontology and deontology. This place is projection, respectively the self-conscious quality of the spiritual. The object of ontology is the world created by necessity; the object of deontology or axiology is a world created self-consciously and freely through knowledge. The principle of the former is substance; the object of the latter is value. The value of the self-consciousness of the spirit is manifested in every value and so the root of every value is the self-affirmation of the self. Reflection upon this affirmation creates in us a delight in the content of self-consciousness; so the self-consciousness, or the spiritual, that creates in us this delight has absolute value.

b. Possibilities and Limits of a Theology Based on Böhm's Philosophy

Loránt Hegedűs (1996) calls 'value theology' a theology which makes theological enquiries based on the theological implications of Böhm's philosophical system. He

however, does not consider seriously the full theological implications of this philosophy. To use the term 'value theology' implies that only certain aspects of Böhm's philosophy are used in the theological investigation. We have seen above that in Böhm's thought the issue of value, although important, is only a secondary issue in comparison to epistemological issues. It is better to speak about a neo-Kantian philosophical system, in which epistemological concerns lead to deontological and ethical answers. Consequently, we can speak about 'value theology', only to the extent that specifically deontological issues are borrowed from Böhm and are made the basis for a theological investigation. If issues related to epistemology and ontology are the key ideas of a theological system, then the term 'value theology' is not comprehensive enough. In a case such as this, it would be better to talk about a theology that uses a particular expression of neo-Kantian philosophy. It is not the goal of this thesis to consider this issue in detail. However, reading the following pages it will become clear that Transylvanian Reformed theology prior to the reception of Barth's theology presented similar features to that of other Protestant thinkers in Europe. An exception, however, may be the emphasis of the Transylvanians on cultural issues, to which Böhm's thinking on values and the valuing self had a significant influence and the stress on which we can easily understand if we consider the special minority situation of the Hungarians in Transylvania.

In my opinion, Hegedűs' statement, that Transylvanian Reformed theology at the beginning of the twentieth century can be called 'value theology', is an over simplification and does not facilitate the highlighting of those characteristics and tendencies that were specific to individual theologians, and movements of this period. But what kind of theological system could actually be built on Böhm's philosophy?

Bartók has pointed out that in Wilhelm Windelband's³⁰ philosophy there is a place for God-talk, in his concept of the 'holy', and in his discussion about the religious forms of values (Bartók 2002[1934]:188). Böhm, however, who was a likeminded neo-Kantian, does not refer explicitly to God, although in his philosophy there are theological implications.

It seems to me that Böhm's philosophy best serves for a theology with liberal colouring. The object of his philosophy is the human spirit, as the precondition of all human endeavours (Horkay 1938:108). In this philosophy categories of human spirit are what make possible, but at the same time, condition the way the world appears to us. Following Kant's example, he cannot speak about the things-in-themselves, but, unlike Kant, he did not work out regulative ideas to point towards God, the soul or eternity.

According to Böhm's epistemology, we know the world only in the unity of the self and non-self – in the self-positing of self. For Böhm there is no objective knowledge of the reality that transcends us, since we 'can only know what we ourselves have created for ourselves' (Bartók 2003[1925]:20). Böhm indeed emphasised the objective character of our knowledge when he stated that knowledge takes its objectivity from the image created necessarily in the self. Böhm would agree with the idea that the impact of the object of knowledge starts the knowing process, but this is not to say that there is some conformity between our knowledge and the object of knowledge. This means that our knowledge is objective only logically; psychologically it is still subjective (Bartók 2003[1925]:22). Böhm proposed the truth of knowledge to be in the degree to which the image of the object created necessarily in the human spirit corresponds to the image of the knowledge consciously projected by the spirit (Böhm 2003[1883]:8). If we apply this epistemology to the knowledge of God, we see that

³⁰ Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), German neo-Kantian philosopher to the system of whom Böhm is the closest.

there is no possibility for an objective knowledge of God in the sense that our knowledge would reflect who God really is. In a theology that would be built on Böhm's philosophy, God were to be known in the self, in that necessarily created image that the self finds in itself. This concept is very close to Schleiermacher's position, in which God can be known in that feeling, which is created in us due to our sense of absolute dependence on God. Even in Schleiermacher's position, one can speak about an objective knowledge of God, since he took seriously that God is the initiator of the feeling of dependence on him. Böhm's objective idealism, however, would not give us the possibility for an objective knowledge of God as we find it in the later Barth. Barth's theology of the Word has a strong emphasis on the possibility of knowing God objectively in grace, in God's act of giving himself in revelation to men for such knowledge. This emphasis, however, is not evident in the early Barth, when a strong dialectic between God and man is stressed. Barth's preoccupation at that time was to keep God and man apart, with the clear intention of avoiding the kind of view that Schleiermacher's position imposed on the theology of his days. For this reason in Barth's reception in Transylvania theologians formerly dedicated to Böhm's philosophical thinking needed to clarify their epistemological position and faced the challenge to alter Böhm's philosophy to make it more congenial with theology.

Böhm's anthropocentrism can also be seen from the way he interpreted the concept of Hegel's spirit. Böhm, like Hegel,³¹ by spirit understood the human spirit (Bartók 2003[1925]:30ff.) and he followed Hegel on the stages of its development, too. He asserted not only the spiritual character of the essence (Böhm 2003[1883]:78ff.), but exactly because of this, also the unity between the spirit and the world (Böhm

³¹ According to Peter Singer: 'A phenomenology of the mind is really a study of how mind appears to itself... Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* traces different forms of consciousness... showing how more limited forms of consciousness necessarily developed into a more adequate one' (Singer 1983:48).

2003[1883]:81f.). The theological implications of this idea could lead to pantheism that the Barthian interpretation of the theology of the Word would certainly exclude.

Böhm's deontological position, and his notion of the 'required', are strong incentives for those who are interested in cultural issues. The spirit that measures all value with its self-value, will aspire to bring about the 'required'. The content and value of the 'required' and the direction of its development are not revealed in something above culture, namely (special) revelation – which in Barth's theology judges and changes culture – but in a process of human development governed by the self-value of the spirit. Böhm's concept of 'required' was used by Sándor Tavaszy in his theology of culture and in the way he explained the role of philosophy (see VI.B.2.f and VI.C.3).

It is not my goal to research 'value theology' in depth and I do not intend to estimate the degree of allegiance of certain theologians to Böhm. I have rather wanted to sketch the philosophical context of the theological activity in the Reformed church for the period of the study and provide a framework of reference by which to show the presence or absence of theological developments.

c. The Role of Value Theology in Theological Development in Transylvania

So called value theology, however, as interpreted in the history of Hungarian theology, only vaguely follows Böhm's philosophy. I pointed out above that I find the expression 'value theology' too restrictive to apply to Transylvanian Reformed theology. Since, however, the term was used by critics,³² I also use it conventionally giving my conclusion of it at the end of this section. A scholarly study of the way in which 'value theology' is built on Böhm's philosophy has not yet been done. Loránt Hegedűs has attempted a study in this area, but he deals only with the general shape of value

³² Besides Loránt Hegedűs, the term was used by Sándor Koncz in his work entitled *Faith and Religion*. See Koncz 1942.

theology and with its historical relatedness to earlier theological schools. The study of its detailed relatedness to Böhm and its philosophical organism would fall outside of the volume and scope of this thesis, but we can nevertheless outline its characteristics and its historical importance.

In what follows I show that value theology was both something to which a theology of the word reacted against and – at least in Transylvania – could also be a transition towards Barth's theology of the Word. We need to pay attention to the following aspects:

(i.) *The problem of valuing.* Value theology building on insights from Böhm thinks that Christianity is a new way of valuing. Due to its moral character the place of Christianity, like that of the human spirit in general, is in the realm of deontology belonging to the world of the *required*. Böhm applied the idea of projection from his theory of knowledge to religion and said that 'whatever is the content of religion in terms of emotions is then reiterated by religion with *scientific certainty* for human consciousness' (Koncz 1942:104).

When Böhm developed in his *Axiology* the way of human valuing (see heading a. above) he emphasised the activity of the self as attaching value to, and recognising the value of the object of knowledge. This idea is in fact the extension of his epistemology into the process of valuing. Böhm wanted to confer objectivity to the process of valuing and maintained that valuing, like knowing, is not arbitrary since it belongs with objective necessity to the valued object. At the same time he refused to define the measure of value against an absolute value external to the self, or indeed the object itself, since he thought that the object escapes our ability to know it; knowing is always done by the self through its inner constitution. Böhm did not separate creation from evaluation of the object of knowledge, since in his view the same self creates and values the image of the object of knowledge.

The idea that Christian religion belongs to deontology (the realm of the required) would not be alien to Barth's thinking; in Christianity God's requirements are expressed towards man. But Barth – especially in his early years – could not place what Böhm would call the *required*, which for Barth is from God and is expressed in the revelation of his word, in the same realm as the 'human spirit in general'. At the same time the measure of valuing cannot be conceived as being 'the self, through its inner constitution'; again for Barth it is the revealed Word of God that judges man, rather than affirming his ability to judge.

(ii.) *The problem of the spirit*. On the basis of the way György Bartók comments on Böhm's position regarding moral valuing one might say that in his system there is place secured for God. The nature of Böhm's text, however, is ambiguous, and consequently Bartók's commentary on it is erroneous. The doctrine of moral valuing was published posthumously as volume five of *Man and his World*. Its text was edited and expanded by Bartók himself using his notes taken at Böhm's lectures. Bartók's commentary goes as follows. The object of moral valuing is the moral act in which the inner being of man is exposed. The moral act of *valuing* is directed towards the *decision* to act, in which the morality of the action is measured. The decision to act is good if it fulfils the criteria of freedom and rationality. Both of these criteria are needed, since a decision leads to a good act only if through it the spirit (intelligence and self-consciousness) is manifested. 'The one through whose act' – Bartók quoted Böhm – 'the spirit is made manifested has a calm consciousness, *because in this spirit God himself is manifested*: this is his self-projection in us. This kind of [morally good] action is a duty for man; the spirit dwelling in me obligates me to manifest it through my free act' (Bartók 2002[1934]:192).

Zoltán Mariska's opinion about this text is that 'it is very questionable, whether Böhm himself would have published this writing in this form and with such a content

(in Böhm 2003[1883]:vii). If this is indeed Böhm's position, and not Bartók's editorial intervention in the text, this would not only mean that Böhm secured a place for God in his system, but that he would have made God the measure of valuing in human experience. According to this humans would know what value is since they find in themselves the projection of the absolute value, which is God.

Bartók interpreted Böhm's idea of the value of moral action as being the spirit desiring morally good action; the spirit is then understood as God's projection in us. In my opinion 'Spirit as God's projection' could be considered either a new development in Böhm's thought, which he did not fully develop in his lifetime, or an editorial intervention made by Bartók, that he considered necessary to make his master's thought more coherent. To equate spirit and God is indeed required if one wants to go beyond the limits of subjective idealism as Böhm conceived it – as Transylvanian theologians tended to do.

The editorial intervention might seem a reasonable development after all if we consider further adjustments brought to Böhm's thinking by Reformed theologians. This tendency shows us that Böhm's philosophy needs to be supplemented with other theological ideas in order to make it useful for theology. Makkai, for example, in interpreting Böhm, easily moved from human spirit to God as Spirit. He appreciated Böhm's philosophy since it warns us that the 'final and only reality and value is the Spirit which possesses purity, freedom, truth and love and in this way corresponds to the testimony of the gospel: God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth' (Makkai 1925:250). Makkai indicates that Böhm was not a theologian as such, so one cannot expect of him to work in theological terms; the taking-over of his philosophy would not result in a 'new theological trend'. To make use of his thinking a theologian was needed 'who by appropriation of philosophy can build on the scientific certitude of a modern *worldview* the reality of his personal and living faith. By making

his faith self-conscious he can find in religion that value system, through which religion will become a constructive force, a life transforming power in the soul of the modern man and in the whole area of culture' (Makkai 1925:250).³³

The above quotation from Makkai is important for us to see the nature of value theology. This theology materially was not much different from the general liberal trend, against which the Barthian theology of the Word reacted. This is how Makkai appreciates the 'new trend' of value theology.

This trend validated with all power that pure scientific spirit and aspiration that was the most precious heritage of the liberalism in Nagyenyed and the personal and living religion that the evangelical trend spoke about, but at the same time renewed both of them. It moulded the liberal heritage into a newer, more modern and more real worldview, and deepened and brought all the aspects of the religion of the evangelical trend in connection with every requirement of life (Makkai 1925:250).

Makkai hailed the promise of value theology when he expressed its impact on his own life (see II.B.2.a) and also enjoyed the revival of the new scientific spirit made by this theology. He thought that the new trend in which religious experience and scholarly approach meet so plastically 'does not require any compromise from faith', since faith was not considered to be some kind of speculation 'but a real fact'. Value theology regarded that 'it is in the interest of faith to require scientific explanation, as a human proof of revelation and thus being able to connect with the cultural work of the spirit, for the sanctification of the whole human life' (Makkai 1990:36-37).

(iii.) *The problem of the reality of religion.* The reality of religion was seen by value theology as consisting in the value-reality of religion. Value theology used the liberal concept of religion and defined it as 'the *sui generis*, independent and special

³³ He thought of László Ravasz, one of the greatest figures of the Hungarian Protestantism of the twentieth century. The reason for which we look to Makkai and not to Ravasz is that Ravasz left Transylvania by the time when Barth's theology was about to be received there. He held many important positions in the church including that of professor, editor of major scholarly journals and that of a bishop. He was the best Reformed penman of the twentieth century and his literary achievements are still unequalled.

fact of human spirit' (Koncz 1942:105). It explained redemption from a preoccupation with the *given* world to the *required* one and it was regarded as the acceptance of the values of the required world and the reproduction of them in life. In its definition of religion, however, it seeks to improve on the immanent religion-concept of Schleiermacher. Koncz said that 'religion is the value of human spirit that points beyond itself' but at the same time it is an experience that elevates 'the human spirit to its highest and finest efficiency'. According to Koncz the basis of the experience of value, and at the same time the measure of value of spirituality is the *Holy* (Koncz 1942:105). In my opinion Böhm's philosophy is too narrow for value theology at this point, which tries to integrate the idea of the *Holy* from Rudolph Otto (Otto 2001[1917]:7ff.). The idea of revelation also emerges, which is still far from the position of a theology of the word, but nevertheless points towards it, preparing the way in Transylvania for Barth's theology of the Word. The need for the concept of revelation in value theology emerges from the concept of God's transcendence and the concept of absolute value. In value theology we can understand God only if he gives himself in revelation and makes himself known to us in communication of his saving will. Revelation, however, is understood as a unmediated religious experience (Fekete 2000:41). Since revelation is necessary the best value-source is the Bible and the greatest value Christ, the prince of the Bible. Value theology at the same time considers itself to be a constructive theology, since it attempts to evaluate in its value system all biblical ideas, with the aim of building up the church. Under the influence of an emerging Calvinism, value theology was mixed with ideas taken on board from that trend of thought; thus Calvinism is regarded to be the most valuable among the expressions of religious cultures.

I conclude by saying that value theology is a kind of revival of the liberal theological approach by means of certain ideas from Böhm's philosophy, in which the

cultural and scientific aspect is still dominant, but in which there are some constructive and Calvinist (evangelical) elements mixed together. Value theology was embraced by the generation of theologians our study deals with and as the time went by the shift mentioned in the thinking of the individual theologians happened sooner or later. The fact that the nature of value theology is in the end more congenial to liberalism is best illustrated by the development of György Bartók's theology. As the most faithful disciple of Böhm, he consequently followed his philosophy in the attempt of constructing a theology. Makkai thinks that Bartók's system

is the result of the trend that was established by Schleiermacher under Kant's influence and was developed into liberal theology, based also on Böhm's critical idealism. We can boldly tell [his system] is the definitive coronation of the Kant-Schleiermacher concept, in which the trend of Ödön Kovács reached its ultimate culmination (Makkai 1925:305).

3. The Evangelical Movement

The lessons from the history of this 'evangelical' movement in Transylvania prompt us to pay attention to the strong cultural awareness of the Transylvanians when we are considering the reception of a certain theological trend or spiritual practice. As the argument of this thesis unfolds, we shall see that Barth's reception was also determined by the way the recipients regarded his theology as being compatible or not with the indigenous culture.

This movement, the beginning of which in Transylvania was around the turn of the twentieth century, was represented intellectually by professors Kenessey and Kecskeméthy who moved from Budapest to the new Theological Faculty. It was also called 'pietistic' and the 'living-Christian's' movement. First of all, it desired to renew the personal Christian life by means of the experience of conversion and sanctification, but it also desired the renewal of the whole church. In its approach it did not agree with Transylvanian rationalism, liberalism or with any church-centred constructive

initiatives. The goal of the constructive tendencies in the church was to revive church activities and Christian spirituality in the Reformed Church. They, however, can not be considered to be theological trends, since their pursuit was possible from various theological positions – liberals and more conservatives alike.

The evangelical, or pietistic movement, was in general rejected by Transylvanian church leaders and theologians; it was seldom appreciated or its critique tempered. Makkai thought that this trend was 'foreign from Transylvanian tradition', but 'it was not pietistic in the historical and full meaning of the word, especially not in the excesses of Pietism'. The movement had only a few followers, almost exclusively from the Bethánia movement,³⁴ in spite of the fact that Kenessey was dean and professor at the Theological Faculty, later bishop of Transylvanian Church District and Kecskeméthy was a fine Old Testament scholar. They were charged with regarding Transylvania as a kind of 'foreign mission field' and that they regard the people here as 'heathens' and 'unbelievers'. According to Makkai the evangelical movement 'did not know the characteristics of the Hungarian Reformed folk-spirit, did not consider joining in the existing roots and fitting in with the course of natural development, but wanted to lay a new foundation, making the old one dishonest and reprobate, by trying to silence and forget it' (Makkai 1925:248). The 'new' in the movement, in fact, was its tendency to renew the church by building from *below* and not from *above* as was the case of the 'constructive movement', emphasising personal piety and not church activities and programs. Its goal was to lead church members to Christ through personal repentance and to enrich their spiritual life by encouraging systematic Bible reading and fellowshiping between Christians (Kecskeméthy 2003:18, 36, 87, 105).³⁵ The

³⁴ First taking shape in Budapest, about the end of the nineteenth century (1881) and later spread among the Hungarian speaking Reformed people.

³⁵ This recent collection of articles contains publications from the first decades of twentieth century.

emerging constructive movement, as a comparison, experimented with the encouragement of attendance at different traditional church services, guarding the authority of the clergy and promoting different church-events and projects.

The conservative leaning of Transylvanians is reflected by their opinion that each period of church history and each theological trend, including rationalism and liberalism, contained good elements that satisfied the God-demand of the people. In László Ravasz' opinion the evangelical movement was aligned to the spirituality of the sixteenth century, and refused what was different from it. But the whole of post-Enlightenment thought and modern theology is different from it (Ravasz 1992:109).³⁶ Ravasz thinks that Kecskeméthy in his personal piety could bridge the gap between the seventeenth century and modern theology. In Kecskeméthy's theology: 'the teaching, death, resurrection and the constant personal presence of Jesus of Nazareth is the perfect truth and absolute revelation. Kecskeméthy experienced it in his new birth through the Holy Spirit, so its reality and truth is above all criticism' (Ravasz 1992:109).

The evangelical movement in fact was not specifically theological, but a movement of spirituality. The movement could not respond intellectually to theological rationalism or liberalism so over against them it posited a positive Christianity and instead of a scholarly approach determined by the study of religion they emphasised the Christian personality (Koncz 1942:99). As far as Kecskeméthy's scholarly approach to the Old Testament is concerned, this was in line with critical liberal theology. Makkai observes that even if Kecskeméthy through his 'spirituality and church activity was linked with this trend, he was entirely independent in his scholarly work and in his critical proceedings he eclipses even the *unbelieving* theologians from Nagyenyed' (Makkai 1925:264).

³⁶ This 1992 book is Ravasz's memoir and could not be published under the Communists.

The lesson from the treatment of the evangelical movement in Transylvania is that the church officially refused a spirituality that did not emerge from its historical development and did not respect its view on culture and its ecclesiology.

4. Confessional Calvinism

The church-building tendencies that appeared in the first part of the twentieth century led to the emergence of Confessional Calvinism in Transylvania.³⁷ The reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania was offered mostly by theologians who were open both to Confessional Calvinism and Barth's theology of the Word. As we shall see below the reception of Barth was both facilitated and limited by allegiance to Confessional Calvinism.

Since theological liberalism proved to be a failure for church life, ways were sought for the renewal of the church. Yet in their constructive attempts, Transylvanian theologians were gradually shifting towards a more conservative position, namely towards a confessional version of Calvinism, which fully took shape in the 1920s. This phenomenon, in fact was part of a more general resurgence of Calvinism in Europe by the end of the nineteenth, and the first part of the twentieth century, a phenomenon that was faithfully mirrored among Hungarian speaking Protestants.

Budapest was the centre of the so called *Historic Calvinism* whose leader was Jenő Sebestyén. It is called 'historic' because it wanted to apply the principles of Calvinism in Hungary in the way Reformed theology had formulated them in its historical development, attempting to influence both church and political life (Forgács 1929:38). Sebestyén followed in the footsteps of the Dutch Abraham Kuyper's dogmatic and political principles together with Bavinck's ethical principles promoting a

³⁷ Koncz (1942:102, 118) differentiates between the church building trend and Confessional Calvinism. He lists the former among the *mediation theology* movement and the later is regarded part of the traditional theological movement.

traditional Calvinist theology. After the Trianon tragedy this movement had a certain appeal for the Hungarians, among those who looked to renew the church life along the line of Calvinist dogmatic teaching. The movement also tried to organise church life in solid and well defined structures. The trend, however, was not appealing for Transylvanians since its more dogmatic shape was outside the Transylvanian historical tradition, the spirit of which was more inclined towards culture and worldview issues looked at from a liberal perspective. At the same time in a minority situation the Hungarians in Transylvania could not think of applying Kuyper's political principles and validating them over against a majority, and strongly exclusivist Romanian political process.

Historic Calvinism regarded Calvinism as in general the most developed religious and ethical system in Christianity. In the spirit of Kuyper's *Stone Lectures* (1932), Calvinism was hailed as the most powerful system 'that embraces all the aspects of human life... places the whole human life before God's guidance' (Koncz 1942:120).

In spite of the fact that Calvinism in this form did not spread in Transylvania we find writings that touch on the social role of Calvinism. For example Tavaszy wrote about the 'Calvinist worldview' (Tavaszy 1927) and the 'world-mission of Calvinism' (Tavaszy 1929c). As we have seen Makkai wrote about 'self-conscious Calvinism' (Makkai 1926) and related it, besides theological issues, to questions of culture, people and nation.

Another centre of Calvinist renewal in the first part of the twentieth century was Debrecen, in Hungary, in the proximity of Transylvania. Koncz called this trend, whose main leader was Imre Révész, *Spiritual Calvinism*. This trend looked for inspiration to the reviving power of French Calvinism, but also to the Hungarian traditional confessional theology and even to value theology fed by Böhm's idealism. The motto of this theology was this: 'Let's make our Calvinism spiritual in the fire of our soul; let's

make it into faith and life, like it was in the life of Calvin and his friends!' (Koncz 1942:122).

Confessional Calvinism in Transylvania was not an entirely new movement, but rather a multicolour trend in which traditional Calvinistic values and principles were increasingly emphasised, especially the role of confessions³⁸ in the life of the church. Although it is not possible to isolate Calvinism in Transylvania from its manifestations in other Hungarian areas Confessional Calvinism can be regarded as a Transylvanian version of neo-Calvinism. Comparing it with Historic Calvinism and Spiritual Calvinism, Confessional Calvinism had in the centre of its attention the church as a spiritual institution the reform of which it sought. It is also difficult to date its beginnings in Transylvania. Since it was not fashionable for Hungarian theologians to make public 'theological repentance', in many cases only subsequent research can establish the turn of a theologian to a different position. But there is more than that. In Transylvania Calvinism re-appeared as a slow shift, as part of the 'theology on its way' from a liberal position towards the theology of the Word. This thesis attempts to test the idea that the reception of Barth's theology itself was done not only in the context of an increasing openness towards Calvinist principles, but in fact was a facilitating factor of this openness. At the same time a strong commitment to Calvinism and Transylvanian cultural tradition limited a full reception of Barth's theology.

During the slow shift in the writings of Transylvanian theologians a certain theology of the Word is taking shape and an approximation to Calvinist doctrines is discernable. I can refer to Makkai's example and his theology of the Word (in Makkai 1926) and to Tavaszy and his Calvinist phase of theological development (for Makkai see section IV.B and for Tavaszy section VI.A.2). The story of the resurgence of

³⁸ 'Confessions' for Confessional Calvinism meant the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, which I call *II. Helvetic Confession*.

Calvinism in Transylvania in fact continues and interweaves with the story of the reception of Karl Barth's theology.

D. Karl Barth's Visit to Transylvania in 1936

The Hungarian Reformed theologians considered the visit of Karl Barth to Transylvania in the autumn of 1936³⁹ to be a very important aspect of the reception of his thought. Barth spent the time between 3-7 October at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár. As an official guest of this institution he delivered a lecture there and visited churches in the area. The visit, beyond its factual importance, had a symbolic value, too. By this time Barth as a theologian had become generally respected and the main objections to his thinking subsided.

Barth's visit was preceded by significant press activity. Various Reformed journals wrote about Barth's life and recent activity, especially his expulsion from Nazi Germany, the policy of which was unpopular among the church leaders in Transylvania. His work was regarded as prophetic and he was acclaimed as one 'doing the greatest ministry in the service of the Word after the Reformation' and that his ministry gave dynamism to the 'perpetual reformation of the church, which especially until the second half of the last century, until his [Barth's] appearance, showed symptoms of exhaustion and deadly fatigue' (Tavaszy 1936a:121). Tavaszzy, like many times in the past, linked Calvin with Barth, who 'teaches the world that the Word of the Lord is the way' on

³⁹ Barth's first visit in Central Europe included besides his visit to Kolozsvár the visit of two Hungarian Reformed Theological schools in Sáropatak and Debrecen, both in Hungary. The title of Barth's lecture in Sáropatak was *People's Church, Free Church and Confessing Church*, in Debrecen and Kolozsvár he lectured on *God's Gracious Election*. McCormack (1995:458) refers to the lecture as given in Debrecen.

Barth visited Hungary (but not Transylvania) again in 1948. He wanted to think through with his Hungarian friends the way they should relate to the newly established Communist system. His trip was severely criticised in Switzerland and he was accused that he 'failed to recognise the totalitarian threat to the world' which Communism was. He did not ask his Hungarian friends to resist or fight against Communism, as he encouraged Hromádka in Bohemia to resist Hitler. (Barth 1969:56-7, Busch 1976:354ff.)

which the church must walk. He expressed his conviction that the 'Protestant world faces a new Reformation through Barth's mission'. Tavaszy considered that Barth's visit would strengthen the new position of dialectical theology in Transylvania. On the eve of the visit, Tavaszy popularised the Barthian theology of the Word and spoke with an elevated tone and with some loftiness of speech about the love Hungarians in Transylvania had towards Barth (Dávid 1936a:97).

We Reformed Hungarians in Transylvania and generally Hungarian Protestants have a special, existential reason to anticipate Barth's visit, since in Hungarian Protestantism we heard and understood for the first time the message that God sent to this world through the theology of Karl Barth (Tavaszy 1936c:95).

The reason for this openness, according to Tavaszy, lay in the characteristic minority destiny of the Hungarians in Transylvania. They recognised that 'beyond and above the economic and political level of living exists a spiritual dimension, namely that God builds his kingdom continuously according to his will, in order to store there all those goods that he himself gives to his people' (Tavaszy 1936c:95).

The focal point of the visit was Barth's lecture on 5 October, both in the morning and in the afternoon, entitled *God's Gracious Election*.⁴⁰ The students of the Faculty, a number of Reformed pastors and church officials made up the audience. I shall return to the content of this lecture in section V. E. The reaction to his lecture was positive; many reacted favourably to the ideas presented by Barth. Next day Barth and some professors of the Faculty classified the 83 questions asked by the audience and prepared 25 topics for Barth to expand on during the afternoon. The Hungarian theologians greatly appreciated his spontaneous answers that gave an insight into the richness of Barth's personality.

⁴⁰ The lecture was published in German in the *Theologische Existenz Heute*, issue 1936/47. Later Barth worked its ideas into CD II/2.

We were able to have a share of the manifestation of such personal testimony, as we never experienced it before. The testimony had such a pervasive force that nobody remained in the position of a passive beholder, but received an inner compulsion from God to follow his will. Barth later in the afternoon stood with the same aliveness and freshness on the foundation of reformation theology, defending it as at the beginning of his lecture (Tavaszy 1936d:435).

Tavaszy, after the visit characterises Barth in affectionate words:

I have never known in a great man more kindness and more humility, but at the same time more determination, courage and inner ardent power than I have seen shining through Barth's personality. Barth gave a new gleam and new glitter to the name of the theologian, because he gave it a new meaning... in order that today everybody can wear it not only with inner joy, but also with external elation, all those who have the right to bear this honourable name (Gálffy 1986:342).

Under the impact of Barth's visit Sándor Tavaszy and Lajos Imre prompted the Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár to award an honorary professorship to Karl Barth. The diploma was dated on January 30, 1937. It is interesting to note the way that Tavaszy argues for Barth's merit: 'The faith and reformation thinking of Karl Barth served as one of the most blessed avenues that *the fresh water of Reformation might reach us again* purely and unmixed in a time when the best sons of our church yearn after new life' (Tavaszy 1938:69, italics added).

Echoing Barth's visit Lajos Imre also used the opportunity to declare that the teaching of dialectical theology about the Word of God had become strongly rooted in Transylvania: 'the Reformed pastor today cannot ignore what dialectical theology teaches about the majesty of the Word of God' – said Imre (Imre 1936a:260). Besides the prophetic character of Barth's theology, Imre thought that its merit is the strong struggle against natural theology. 'This issue' – said Imre – 'is not an abstract dogmatic question, that easily can be overlooked... but it is a bloody reality: it is against a renewed humanism, the thought of a totalitarian state, the worship of man, and against the absolute human sovereignty, it is a command to stand against all predictable protest against God's royal prerogative in the church' (Imre 1936a:260). In my view this

statement encouraged people not only against the anti-minority politics of the Romanian national state between the wars, but prophetically prepared the hearts for the future, and indicated the position the Reformed church in Romania should have against communism ten years later.

The breakthrough caused by Barth's visit in the reception of his theology in Transylvania is shown by the fact that bishop János Vásárhelyi, who followed Sándor Makkai in the office, 'expressed his joyful conviction that in the renewal of his church Karl Barth has undoubtedly been one of God's most blessed instruments' (Tavaszy 1936d:436).

E. Conclusion

The reception of Karl Barth's theology in Transylvania began in the mid 1920s, and perhaps can be precisely dated to 1923, when Sándor Tavasz published the first review about it. The reception was set in a minority context of a church which was culturally sensitive to its situation struggling for its survival. This cultural sensitivity marked profoundly all theological trends and church movements in the first part of the twentieth century. Beginning with theological rationalism through liberal theology and the emerging Confessional Calvinism all were either nationalistically oriented or wanting to make an impact on the cultural context. The highest scholarly expression of this cultural orientation was done in value theology based on Karl Böhm's objective idealism in which spirit was conceived as the supreme valuing factor. The theological situation in Transylvania in many respects was similar to that of Germany when Barth's theology emerged. Its reception was marked by certain ambiguity due to the specific cultural Protestant context in which great emphasis was laid on the Hungarian character of culture and theological tradition. Thus 'value theology' in the 1920s offered both a

transition towards a more compatible theology with Barth's emphasis on the Word of God and also could be used to criticise this theology. The heyday of the reception of Barth's theology in Transylvania was around Barth's visit in 1936, which marked a breakthrough of the theology of the Word in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Among the Hungarian theologians in Transylvania Barth's name was equivalent with the emerging 'dialectical theology', which was basically understood as a new expression of the theology of the Word and 'was recognised and given acceptance as the doctrine about the Word' (Juhász I 1966:348). From the point of view of our study it is important to understand the developments in Barth's understanding of the doctrine of the Word of God with the intention of laying down a solid reference basis for the evaluation of Karl Barth's reception in Transylvania.

The goal of this chapter is to show that we do justice to Barth's thinking and understand it as it deserves only if we consider the decisive steps in the development of his thinking. The emulation of this development is what exactly we want to see in the reading of Barth by the Transylvanian theologians.

A. The Roots of Barth's Theology of the Word of God

The theological beginnings of Karl Barth are equally rooted in his academic works, pastoral activities and life-experiences. It is well known that Barth's desire to fulfil his pastoral responsibilities and the difficulties he met sparked the search for a sustainable theology. Barth's experience was not only sympathetic for the Transylvanian theologians, but also corresponded with their own experience in fulfilling their pastoral

duties. For Barth the concept of the Word of God had to be defined against the background of preaching and the philosophical position of his days. The task was the same for his recipients in Transylvania.

1. The Word of God and Preaching

Karl Barth during his pastoral work in Safenwil was confronted by the need of bringing the Word of God to his congregation in the context of the problems and aspirations of the working class in this industrial town. In Safenwil the demands of the concrete pastoral ministry caused the greatest crises of his life which set him on a new theological journey (Jüngel 1989:24). Barth, the preacher began making recourse to the Bible, wherein he discovered a 'new world' (1935[1924]:29) and he realised that for preaching, instruction and pastoral care a 'wholly other' theological foundation was needed (Barth 1935[1924]:75). Liberal theology with its optimistic view of man was not a solid foundation for church proclamation and Christian life. Barth's basic idea, that 'God is God', slowly took shape and emerged from pastoral concerns.

With the rediscovery of the Bible and the new world in it, Barth changed the direction of his theological approach 'from below' to 'from above'. He realised that the Bible does not answer our questions, or tell us how we should talk about God, but points to what he says to us; it does not show us the way to God, but is a testimony about how God sought and found the way to us. This God of the Bible is not the non-God of this world, he is not to be found in the things of this world, he does not belong to history, but is the God who reaches us in his self revelation, the God who remains God in and after revealing himself to us.

His thoughts on the actualistic nature of God and revelation not only begin to exhibit the seeds of Barth's theology, but cast light on the turmoil that preoccupied Barth, namely, to find a solution for the task of preaching (Barth 1935[1924]:97). This preoccupation

launched the study out of which the commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* emerged. Barth's main question dealing with the issue of preaching was: 'How the Christian preacher dare to speak of God?', how can he say: 'thus says the Lord'? Theological trends may have changed in the last century, but for the preacher this means no more than the 'turning of a sick man in his bed from one side to another' (Barth 1935[1924]:120). For the contemporary man it is difficult to remain faithful to the scriptural principle of the Reformation, says Barth, because man cannot bear the questioning of him by the Bible any more, since liberal theology sowed the seed of an optimistic anthropology and people are not used to face their situation in the light of revelation (Barth 1935[1924]:119).

At the outbreak of World War I Barth was shocked on finding out that ninety-three intellectuals, among whom he discovered 'the names of almost all my German teachers', signed a manifesto to support the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm (Busch 1976:81). From this ethical failure, Barth clearly saw that the exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions of his theology teachers were not in order. In Barth's eyes, the writings of German theologians lost their validity and he resorted to a critical evaluation of the theology of his days far back to Schleiermacher. Barth recognised that the theology put forward by Schleiermacher, through Feuerbach leads to such consequences as the shameful manifesto of the German intellectuals. Schleiermacher, thinks Barth,

is disastrously dim-sighted in regard to the fact that man as man is not only in *need* but beyond all hope of saving himself; that the whole of so-called religion, and not least the Christian religion, *shares* in this need; and one can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice (Barth 1935[1924]:196).

From here there is only a step to conclude the fundamental dialectic of God and man: 'God stands in contrast to man as the *impossible* in contrast to the possible, as *death* in contrast to life, as *eternity* in contrast to time' (Barth 1935[1924]:197). However, Barth's experiential incentives to reconsider his theological position would have been

without much result had he not also delimited himself from the philosophical presuppositions of liberal theology.

2. The Word of God and Philosophy

Karl Barth's deliberate intention was to abandon the idealist theology built on neo-Kantian and Hegelian premises and construct what Dalferth has aptly called an 'eschatological realism' (Dalferth 1989:14ff.). In neo-Kantianism God was deprived of real existence and was reduced to a kind of regulative idea of human thinking or moral action (McCormack 1995:46). In Hegelian thinking God became dialectically one with the world which was conceived as the relative and estranged form of the Absolute Spirit (Nyíri 1991:314). Barth, however, pleaded that God should be regarded a transcendent reality who confronts us in time and history with the challenge of his eternal lordship – hence his eschatological realism. Ingolf U. Dalferth, referring to Barth's eschatological realism, thinks that the reason for this mixed theological and philosophical vocabulary is 'an intentional way of provoking response to the scandalous character of Barth's position' as this 'unashamed realist' (Dalferth 1989:14). Barth's intention however was purely theological. He wanted to posit a transcendent God, whose real existence is not swallowed up by 'anthropological' revelation and idealist epistemological theories.

In the previous chapter we have seen that in Transylvania too, the ruling philosophy was neo-Kantianism, which applied to theology carried a strong anthropological emphasis regarding revelation. The objective idealist epistemology was highly regarded and its scholarly approach was thought worthy to be followed. A full reception of Barth in Transylvania needed to pay attention to Barth's intention in theology over against anthropological revelation and idealist epistemology (see VI.C and VII. A.1).

a. The Incomprehensibility of God in Neo-Kantian Philosophy

The neo-Kantian philosophy against which Barth formulated his theology upheld the incomprehensibility of God. Wilhelm Herrmann, *the* theology teacher 'par excellence' of Barth exercised a strong influence on him in his early years (Busch 1976:44f.). By the time Barth studied with him Herrmann debated certain teachings of the neo-Kantian school, such as the nature of religious knowledge and the nature of God (McCormack 1995:54ff.).

Marburg neo-Kantians, as indeed Böhm himself in Transylvania, had no room for a God who stood outside the thinking human being. For them religion was not the product of a transcendental revelation of a transcendent God, but an important factor only in the formation of culture. McCormack observes that the idea of God of Herrmann Cohen – a neo-Kantian from Marburg – has an exclusively logical relationship with the world and not at all a personal one. 'God is like a mathematical concept zero: a very important placeholder in the system, but completely without content, featureless and colourless' (McCormack 1995:48). Hence, for neo-Kantian philosophy the content of the idea of God is empty.¹ There is nothing to be said about the nature of God; God is incomprehensible. This idea of God's incomprehensibility, however, is the result of a speculative approach with a starting point in the consideration of the nature of the human mind, and does not derive from the knowledge of the Word of God – as Karl Barth would have put it.

¹ H. Cohen wanted to 'purify' Kant's critical method and dropped Kant's idea that knowledge is the result of sensations and the categories of knowledge. Cohen thought that sensation is 'nothing more than a question mark without value for cognition' (McCormack 1995:44). Thus knowledge for Cohen originates only from the mind and its categories. At the same time he regarded being to be product of thought and by this he excluded the Kantian noumenal from his system. Kant thought that God belongs to the noumenal.

b. The Knowledge of the Mystery of God: Barth's Response

Barth's response to neo-Kantianism is not in a form of a philosophical debate specifically oriented to the issues it raises. Instead, he developed a theology, which denies and repudiates those premises on which a parallel theology to neo-Kantian philosophy would have been built. Even in his early writings he makes clear that the answers for the existential questions of man are not in the human sphere, but outside of it, not in the process of living, but at 'the edge of living' and this answer is God (Barth 1935[1924]:196). The development of dialectic itself in Barth's thought is a vivid example of a protest against putting man and God on the same side of the equation. Barth's criticism of religion can be seen as a strong dividing line between neo-Kantianism and his own theology. Religion is seen as something belonging to the human possibilities and stands on this side of the great divide that separates God and man. Neo-Kantianism is interested in religion; Barth is more interested in the *fact* of the Kingdom, which has been brought about by the revelation of God.

Barth accepted Kant's conclusion about the unknowability of the noumenal and never opposed the idea of God's incomprehensibility. Nevertheless, for him this was not the last word to be said, as it was for the speculative philosophers (i.e. neo-Kantianism) and mystics. Barth's idea of the incomprehensibility of God was not derived from an epistemology of mind or an ethical system but from hearing the Word of God. The Christian theologian and the preacher know from revelation that God is incomprehensible, he knows that even if does not comprehend Him, he knows Him: 'in creation and by his Word God came forth from the secret seat of his majesty in order that humans may truly know him' (GD:351).

Making the Word of God the centre of his theological thinking Barth avoids the abyss of God's incomprehensibility. The statement that God is incomprehensible belongs merely to 'the broken human spirit as it becomes aware of the abyss of its own

ignorance and despair of itself, that it is merely the sum of Kant's critique of reason' (GD:365). However, through revelation we are given conceptually the knowledge of God. This given knowledge is the only 'objective proof of God'. The demonstrative force of this proof for the human knowing, however rest entirely on God, since 'it does so only when and insofar as the revelation of God, the Word of God, meets this human knowledge' (GD:357).

The speculative type of statement about the incomprehensibility of God does not rest on the true knowledge of God – thinks Barth. 'In itself, it may merely say that we know nothing about God that we can only dream in metaphysical matters.' (GD:357). The thesis of God's incomprehensibility, because of speculation or false understanding of revelation as human self-illumination, can lead, according to Barth, to a Faustian type of human self-exaltation. Barth thinks that the dialectical relation between our incomprehension of God and revelation should be reversed: 'in other words, it is because and to the extent that we know God that we know his incomprehensibility' (GD:358). Theologians, then, venture to speak about God, because God in revelation entered our world of conceptuality and made known the mystery of his nature. Barth maintains that theologians talk conceptually about God, but this talk is an attempt to 'define and describe and think out what only God himself can say' (GD:360).

Barth is convinced, however, that our conceptual speaking about God will include negations 'that are part of the concept of God', but only revelation can produce 'truly fruitful and illuminating negations and veilings in Christian speech'. The conceptualisation resulting from God's revelation bears the stamp of God's revealing himself as a subject. This means for Barth that God in revelation is concealed from us; our knowledge of him is indirect. What we know about him directly is his mystery. This mystery, however, is not the mystery of the mystics. In mysticism, God's nature cannot be defined 'unless we are to call God's incomprehensibility his nature' (GD:363). Barth

emphasises that the mystery we know about God's nature is not the mystery we could experience outside of the I-Thou relationship with Him. It is *God's* mystery, 'and therefore and to that extent a blessed and revealing mystery, only in the act of his revelation'. In the act of revelation, God reveals the essence of his nature as Person and Lord (GD:351).

B. Two Phases of the Word of God: the Eschatological and the Christological Word

Karl Barth's new approach to doing theology gave birth to a new kind of theology, which can be called critically realistic and dialectical (McCormack 1995:67, 129). Barth critically evaluated the idealist theology of his predecessors and reacted against their idea of God. As we have seen above, he did not consider God as the postulate of moral thinking, or a useful idea for establishing human personality. Barth postulates God in himself, as a complete spiritual reality independent of human existence and thinking. The new element in Barth's theology is that he consistently considers that the basic relationship between God and man is that of *diastasis*; God and man are in opposition, are of a different kind (Barth 1935[1924]:206ff.). The affirmation 'God is God' is the fundamental of Barth's theology, which is present from the beginning until the end. Although it gave birth to different types of dialectic, the understanding of revelation, and the famous analogy of faith, produced the necessary shifts and emphases. All Barth's difficulties and original solutions sprang from the preoccupation on the one hand of keeping God and man apart in a healthy diastasis, because only in this way we can have a right understanding of God and man, and on the other hand of bringing them together in the self revelation of God for man's salvation. The consistent application by Barth of the idea of diastasis results in the so called *dialectical method*, which in fact

materialises in different types of 'dialectics' throughout Barth's work (McCormack 1995:260ff., Migliore 1991:xxviii ff.).

The aim of this section is twofold. First I want to enquire into the nature of the dialectical method in Barth's theology and to observe its consequences for theology of the Word of God. Then I want to make clear that for a right understanding of Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God we need to see that Barth moved from a concept of eschatological Word to a more Christological approach.

1. Searching for a Paradigm

For finding a way through Barth's rich ideas and immense writings, his critics have attempted to divide Barth's life and thinking in certain periods. We make use of these divisions in order to follow our search in different types of dialectics. The study of dialectics gives us an insight into how Barth conceptualised the Word of God.

a. 'From Dialectic to Analogy'

The most popular division has been that of Hans Urs von Balthasar. He maintained that there are two turning points in Barth's thinking. The first is from liberalism to a 'radical Christianity' which occurred during World War I, 'and found expression in *The Epistle to the Romans*' and has a strong dialectical character. The second is 'the final emancipation from the shackles of philosophy enabling him to arrive at a genuine, self-authenticating theology'. The 'second conversion', although a gradual process, leads to a theology which is characterised by the gaining of ground by an analogical thinking. To formulate such thinking Anselm's book *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* had a decisive role. Barth has turned from dialectic to analogy – said Balthasar (1992:87ff.).

b. 'Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology'

Bruce L. McCormack, challenged Balthasar's expression 'turn from dialectic to analogy' and shows that there is only one 'conversion' in Barth, from liberalism to a critically realistic theology and the whole of Barth's theology has a dialectical character (McCormack 1995:14ff.). The difference between the *Christliche Dogmatik* and *Church Dogmatics* is not great enough to justify Balthasar's formula. While 'dialectical method' has been tempered by a more dogmatic method, dialectic as such was never simply left behind. McCormack argues that dialectical method was 'never the principal form of dialectic'. Dialectical method like 'analogy'

[H]ad its ground in the *Realdialektik* of the divine movement in revelation and was simply a conceptual tool for bearing witness to it. 'Dialectical method' *could* have been abandoned altogether – in truth, it was not, but it could have been – without in the least requiring the abandonment of the vastly more important *Realdialektik* (McCormack 1995:18).

McCormack differentiates between dialectical method and other forms of dialectic and introduces the concept of *realdialektik*. It is 'real' dialectic because it refers to the dialectic character of the 'objectively real relations' of two entities (McCormack 1995:11). This can be contrasted with dialectical method which is a way of speaking or structuring the theological discourse; dialectical method is 'noetic', and it is not 'real' dialectic. Barth is better understood if we concentrate on the dogmatics that he used than on dialectic as a method (McCormack 1995:20f.). By this, we understand that Barth always developed his theology from a certain dogmatic point of view; his theology was influenced by the emphases on certain doctrines like eschatology or Christology. Whenever we witness a 'new beginning' in Barth's theological work, in fact that is a shift of emphasis from one doctrine to another, and it is not a brake, or a 'conversion'.

c. 'Several Recurrent Motifs'

George Hunsinger, unlike Balthasar and McCormack thinks that the attempt to discover a 'single overriding conception' as a key to understand Barth's theology is unlikely to be found (Hunsinger 1991:3ff.). There are 'several recurrent *motifs* or modes of thought' instead. *Actualism* is a motif which refers to the fact that 'being is always an event and often an act'. *Particularism* is a characteristic of both noetic procedure and ontic state of affairs, namely always begin with the particular – Jesus Christ – to general. *Objectivism* describes the means and the status of occurrence of revelation and salvation; the means is through ordinary created objects and the status is that revelation and salvation are 'real, valid and effective' regardless of the acknowledgement of the creature. *Personalism* refers to the idea that God's self-manifestation 'comes to the creature in the form of a personal address'. *Realism* refers to the nature of theological language which by the grace of God can refer to God (an extra-linguistic object). *Rationalism* denotes the fact that theological language 'includes an important rational and cognitive element' (Hunsinger 1991:27ff.).

d. Conclusion

Hunsinger's observation is very useful in the overall understanding of Karl Barth's theology. It helps the reader find fixed ideas of reference in often complicated expositions. The considerations of the motifs clarify seemingly contradictory statements of Barth. Its shortcoming is that it does not give sufficient insight into the historical development of Barth's thought. The development did not occur in the form of a 'conversion' from dialectic to analogy, as Balthasar maintained, but in the form of shifting the dogmatic emphases. The analogy of faith itself (what Balthasar considered the key of analogical thinking), as McCormack showed, is in itself a dialectical concept, since it does not dissolve the dialectics between God and man (McCormack 1995:17). It

refers merely to the fact that through God's grace a correspondence between God's self knowledge and human knowledge of him is established through human words and concepts. The analogy is not *analogia entis*, since the diastasis between God and man is not wiped out.

McCormack's paradigm is more useful for our purposes than the other two presented above for the reason that is more truthful to the content of Barth's writings. It helps us to see how the shift of emphasis from eschatology to Christology determined the shape of his theology. According to this paradigm there are two major stages of Barth's development of the doctrine of the Word of God: eschatological and Christological. In the early material the Word is the Word from eternity which strikes perpendicularly the here and now of our existence. The Word of revelation in the resurrection of Jesus touches the 'old world' as a 'tangent touches the circle, that is, without touching it' (ER II:30). Nevertheless, moving into a more Christological material we find more possibility for God's presence in the world, and beside the 'one Word of God' we read about 'the secular parables of the truth' (in CD IV.3).

McCormack's insight gives us a reference to evaluate Barth's reception in Transylvania. It seems to me that the awareness of different dogmatic emphasis will significantly determine how Barthian thought affects the theological system in which it was received.

2. Dialectics in the Phases of the Word of God

In this section we will investigate the way the concept of eschatological and Christological Word shapes the use of dialectics and the content of Barth's theology. Chronologically this is the period of time which ends with the publication of the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* in 1932.

The classical presentation of the dialectical method in the early years of Barth is put forward in the lecture 'The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry' (in Barth 1935[1924]). Barth starts from the difficulty that lies in the content of the task of the minister (or theology teacher at the university): 'as ministers, we ought to speak of God. We are human, however and cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognise both our *obligation and inability* and by that very recognition give God the glory' (Barth 1935[1924]:186). The 'realdialektik' of God and man – since God conceived as being the 'edge of being' results in a dialectical way of talking about this relationship.

Good theology, according to Barth, keeps the human being in his place; neither reducing him to non-being, nor exalting him through an inadequate theory of immediacy, like did liberal Protestantism. The way of dialectic, as a third option besides dogmatism and self-criticism (mysticism) seems to Barth that avoids the above mentioned dangers. 'Our task is to interpret the Yes and No, and the No and Yes without delaying more than a moment in either a fixed Yes *or* a fixed No' – said Barth (Barth 1935[1924]:207). In this continuous tension of the opposites, the Word of God can be heard, but nevertheless as something concealed. It speaks about the judgement and the grace of God, the condemnation and salvation of man.

Regardless of the consistency in application of dialectical method, dialectical pairs never disappear from Barth's theology. We can observe several pairs of dialectics in Barth. Besides the God-man dialectic there is the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of revelation, dialectic of Adam (the old world) and Christ (the new world), the dialectic of time and eternity, and the dialectic of human existence, which refers to the 'inner-worldly' antinomies experienced in human life (joy and affliction, beauty and ugliness) (see Migliore 1991:xxix and McCormack 1995:266ff.).

Barth in the early period of his writings is more interested in the issue of the possibilities of revelation than in spelling out how this revelation has happened. The

issue of revelation, however, is set in the context of the dialectic between God and man grounded in an eschatological view of the Word of God. 'Eschatological' here means that his understanding about the Word of God was shaped by the tension between present realization and future establishment of the Kingdom of God, leaving very little room for the present realisation of it. Incarnation had not its due place in his system, since revelation was reduced to a single 'mathematical point' – the Christ event.

The break with liberal theology soon put Barth in strong opposition with the idea of religion as a human institution, which in Barth's view helped humans to resist God's voice addressed to him through conscience (Barth 1935[1924]:19ff.). The way of getting right with God is not through human righteousness, but by standing still and waiting for what God wants to tell. Man is not ready to accept God's righteousness, which is 'difficult for him to hear' and instead humbling himself before God, man 'makes a veritable uproar' with his 'morality and culture and religion'. In the crisis of this situation, man needs, above all, to recognise 'God once more as God'. However, this recognition is made only when he gives himself up to God, and does his will. Barth posits God above human existence, since 'his will is not a corrected continuation of our own, he approaches ours as a 'Wholly Other'. There is nothing for our will except a basic re-creation and re-growth'. From this point onward, Barth works with 'fundamental distinctions and relations' (Barth 1935[1924]:24).

In *Romans II*, the diastasis is even sharper. Barth maintains this diastasis and the theme 'God is God', with the slight shifts of emphases required by the dogmatic method. What really concerns Barth is to secure the distinction between human consciousness and the objectively real self-revealing God.

The revelation of God in *Romans II* does not alter significantly the dialectical tension between God and man. Revelation, although it is in history, is not capable of direct observation as 'history, time or thing' (ER II:29). Revelation is veiled in history

since, 'Jesus as Christ can be understood only as Problem or Myth. As Christ, He brings the world of the Father' (ER II:30). Nevertheless, the coming of the world of the Father does not release the dialectical tension between the two worlds. The specific point of Jesus' resurrection is important as the time of revelation when

the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches the circle, that is, *without touching it*. Moreover, precisely because does not touch it, it touches it as its frontier – as the new world. The resurrection is therefore an occurrence in history, which took place outside the gates of Jerusalem, [that is outside history] (ER II:30).

The power of God that has been revealed in the encounter with God is not detectable in nature or the soul of man as a change that man owns. Faith is needed for salvation as the only link between the here and now (time) and eternity.

Barth's language is highly dialectical in describing revelation and faith as the realms of the two worlds touching each other, this world and the Kingdom of God. Only faith comprehends the 'unheard *love-less* love of God to do the ever scandalous and outrageous will of God' (ER II:99). Faith recognises God in his incomprehensibility and hiddenness. Faith is the 'impossible assurance', that perceives things that are not as coming into being. To be opened to such a paradox is the only action worthy of man; this is the only 'work' acceptable of man. Revelation apprehended in faith is the 'No' and 'Yes', and 'Yes' and 'No' of God. In this respect, it is judgement of the old and the beginning of the new life. This judgement on all that is not God is drifting man towards non-being. It is also a beginning of the relationship between God and man in which God speaks and man listens. In the dialectic of Adam-Christ, and of judgement and grace, grace wins, since the dynamic of revelation is looked at *sub specie aeternis* (ER II:121).

Barth attributes to faith cosmic importance as 'the place where we are established by God. There is nothing but God Himself, God only; and there the place is no place; for it is the *Moment* ... when man surrender themselves and all that they are to God. The

Moment of the movement of man by God is beyond man; it cannot be enclosed in a system or a method or a way' (ER II:110). What Barth said about man being established by God and that, 'there is nothing but God Himself' caused much controversy about the dialectical method as one leading to the negation of man.² In the supplementary dialectic of the relation of God and man, God overruled man, and the eschatological Kingdom defeated the reality of the historical world.

In *Göttingen Dogmatics*³ the standpoint from which the whole question of dogmatics is viewed is that of the pastor, and the principal question 'What are you going to say in the church?' runs through the work. The time of the writing was that of a shift towards a more positive understanding of the doctrine of the church and the role of incarnation in revelation. The church is regarded the locus of dogmatics and not only that of divine judgement as it was regarded in *Romans II*. Barth's interest was directed more and more towards an enquiry of the confessions of the church, especially the Heidelberg Catechism. He also turned his attention towards the reformation understanding of scripture principle in his lectures about Calvin's theology (Barth 1995[1922]).

Barth however did not abandon the use of dialectics in his theology. Rather, in this period he systematically applied the dialectical method, as the only viable option for theological work. For the question about how is it possible to speak about God the right answer is the dialectical method. This method includes both positive (dogmatic) and negative (mystical) affirmations about God, i.e. in incarnation. There is a 'living

² Balthasar criticised Barth for this 'static and dynamic' dialectic (referring to dialectics of Kierkegaardian and Hegelian type). He thinks that in Barth's thought God is identified with his revelation, the creature as opposed to God, is reduced to nothingness and 'when creature is retrieved by God through revelation, creation is equated with God himself, at least in its origin and goal'. Balthasar passionately concludes that '*The Epistle to the Romans* is the very thing against which it itself raged and thundered: a pinnacle of human religiosity'. Cf Balthasar 1992:84.

³ This first attempt of Barth to write a dogmatics (from 1921) was only published in 1991[1990], but reflects his thought from the period this section refers to.

centre' between the affirmation that God is 'really God' and 'really human', but this living centre is inconceivable and non-intuitional. The dialectical theologian, however, needs to move constantly between the two opposites, like on the edge of narrow rocks, on which 'one can only walk: if he attempts to stand still, he will fall either to the right or to the left, but fall he must' (Barth 1935[1924]:207).

Barth sees humanity in the light of revelation and proposes 'anthropology from above'. Theologians are wrong if they address man on the basis of 'what he seems to be on the surface'. Man has to be regarded as he is presupposed by revelation and not as presented by philosophy. Barth's question in relation to man is 'What man must be because revelation is?' (GD:72) The fact of revelation presupposes that 'man is separated from God but should not be so' (GD:72). Revelation is for the reparation of the damage, which is materialised, in a new relationship with God. Man, however cannot be understood except in relation with God. Apart from God, he is even incapable to understand himself. Humans know themselves as they know God: 'we know ourselves only as God makes himself known to us' (GD:72ff.). Here Barth speaks about the ultimate and most important thing that establishes man: his relationship with God.

The use of dialectics in the period of writing *Göttingen Dogmatics* received a new approach with Barth's shift from an eschatologically grounded theology to one grounded on Christology: the Logos of God – he taught – took to Himself human nature and lived life in and through it. Barth found in this doctrine a parallel to his understanding of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in revelation. God in revelation took to Himself human nature and veiled Himself in the 'incognito' of revelation. Christ was a human being like the others, but in him in every moment was the Second Person of the Trinity, but whose divinity, since it is veiled in the human flesh, can be appropriated only in faith, in the encounter of revelation. Barth attempted in this way to maintain the diastasis of God and man in revelation, and place revelation *in history*,

although not part of history (GD:136ff.). This was a step further from his view in *Romans II*.

Because of this dogmatic shift, Barth's attention from the possibility of revelation was turned to the actuality of it in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God did not cease to be God in incarnation for he wanted to come in history in recognisable form. 'If non-revelation is to be revelation', says Barth, 'everything hinges on God covering his inaccessible divine I-ness with human I-ness as with a veil so that we can grasp him as a person, as one like ourselves' (GD:136). Barth insisted that the incarnation of God would have not reached its goal without God becoming human. Revelation in incarnation is conceived as something that 'escapes direct observation'. The dialectic of God and man is softened in the historical act of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of Jesus Christ means that he is God but it does not mean that it is his humanity that is equated with revelation. God remains the revealing subject in revelation, but nevertheless he is there in his Son: 'He is so much the eternal Lord that the limits stretched out before us do not exist for Him; that the Victor over the contradiction is with us' (GD:118).

With the publication of the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* in 1932, Barth laid down a new basis for his dogmatics. The new basis was neither the abandonment of dialectics nor the application of some elements not found before in Barth's thinking. It was rather the systematic application of the Christological concentration, which began to appear in *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Christocentrism for Barth, says McCormack (1995:454), is 'the attempt to understand every doctrine from a centre in God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ'.⁴

⁴ Barth himself testified: 'in these years I had to learn that Christian doctrine, if it is to merit its name and if it is to build up the Christian Church in the world... has to be exclusively and conclusively the doctrine of Jesus Christ... I should like to call it a Christological concentration' (Barth 1969:43).

C. The Three Forms of the Word of God

1. The Incarnated Christ as the Word of God

In Barth's theology the Word of God is seen as having three forms: Jesus Christ, Holy Scripture and preaching. Jesus Christ the incarnation of God is the fountainhead of revelation and from it emerge the other two forms of the Word of God. Transylvanian theologians, especially Sándor Tavaszy, followed faithfully Barth's teaching on the three forms of the Word of God. I deal with the comparison of the two positions in section VI.B.2.

In the early works of Barth the incarnation of Christ was given less importance and the Christ-event was reduced to the 'mathematical point' of the cross and resurrection. The revelatory power of this event was not 'capable of direct observation', and the new word manifesting through it did not touch the history of the old world (ER II:30). The salvation of God realised through incarnation 'is not an event in the midst of the other events, but is nothing less than the KRISIS of all history' (ER II:57). The judgement of God in the crisis of incarnation is 'the end of history ... by it history is not prolonged but done away' (ER II:77). This tension between history and the Kingdom is the result of the idea of a 'wholly other' God, which in the early Barth made it very problematic to find a place for Jesus Christ's humanity according to the testimony of the gospels.

Although the *Göttingen Dogmatics* cannot yet be characterised as a Christ-centred work (Migliore 1991:xlix),⁵ nevertheless it gives to Christ increasing importance in revealing God's Word. Barth introduces the doctrine of the Trinity in the prolegomena

⁵ Migliore also wrote: While the building blocks of Barth's highly original Christological architectonics in the *Church Dogmatics* are already present in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the latter lacks the imaginative interweaving of the offices, natures, and states of Christ, as well as the detailed interest in the gospel narrative found in the former.' p. li.

on the basis that God is the subject and object of revelation. For this reason the Son needs to be more than the most glorious creature of God, otherwise he could not reveal God; He must be God. Thus for Barth the doctrine of Trinity originates in the doctrine of revelation and becomes the true centre of it (GD:100ff.).

God's self-revelation presupposes his encounter with man in the historical act of the incarnation. In incarnation on the one hand God is both revealed and concealed, and on the other hand God remains God. Without these two basic conditions incarnation would fail to make God known and would lead to inappropriate immediacy dissolving the diastasis God-man. In incarnation God is fully God and man is fully man.⁶ Only in this way the full incognito of God is secured. Without God's incognito revelation is not revelation but part of general humanity. The general access to it would make grace redundant (GD:137-140).

Barth makes an important step further when he admits the historicity of revelation. Historicity however does not mean a 'turning point in world history with Christ's birth' regardless how much influence on the former the latter could have. This conception of historicity would lack the important issue of God's incognito. Revelation for Barth is 'historical in such a way that here, where it is a matter of the present or the immediate past, what has happened in time escapes direct observation just as much there [New Testament times] where the event was still future' (GD:148). Barth admits that revelation has happened in time, but also maintains that the access to it for us (as for those in New Testament times) is by faith alone. Revelation in Jesus Christ is indirect ('only God sees Jesus Christ directly'), but we do meet God in him, since '*this* man, *this man* (we must emphasis both) is God himself who reveals God himself, who

⁶ On this basis Barth rejects the traditional formulation of *kenosis* theory: The *kenosis* of the Son in the incarnation is not that he wholly or partially ceases to be the eternal Son of the Father (otherwise the incarnation would not be revelation), but as the Son of God, he is also made the Son of Man' (GD:156). In *Church Dogmatics* 'kenosis' is the 'veiling of the divine majesty'. Cf CD I.2:37.

by God himself is revealed as God himself. He is God who is not just there but also here ... who is not just with himself but also with us in the world' (GD:153).

In *Church Dogmatics* Barth emphasises revelation as an act which sets clearly the boundary between man and God, but nevertheless brings them together.

Revelation itself is needed for knowing that God is hidden and man blind. Revelation and it alone really and finally separates God and man, by bringing them together. For by bringing them together it informs man about God and about himself, it reveals God as the Lord of eternity, as the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, and characterises man as a creature, as sinner as one devoted to death (CD I.2:29).

Only God can cross the boundary between man and himself and he did it in Jesus Christ – he is free for man. The Son becoming man becomes perceptible for us is such a way that 'He can become cognisable by us by analogy with other forms known to us', nevertheless the veiling of the Logos needs to be maintained. Immediacy 'would be the end of all things because it would mean the abolition of the conditions of our existence' (CD I.2:36). The appropriation of the Son to man in incarnation is so much emphasised by Barth as he affirms that Christ became what we are – flesh; although he is not sinful, yet he stands with us under the judgement of God. Barth anticipates the doctrine of election that is in organic relationship with the doctrine of the Word of God.

In the presentation of the incarnation the shift of the Word of God from eschatological word to Christological word is the most evident, here the dogmatic shift from eschatology to Christology is best seen. While in *Romans II* the Word of God is only another worldly phenomenon coming perpendicularly to touch the world at its boundary, in *Church Dogmatics* we are faced with an approach which gives more space to the Word of God in the world, without reducing it to 'something' in this world.

2. The Word of God as Holy Scripture

From the three forms of the Word of God scripture and preaching are regarded as human words, which however, by grace become the Word of God. The starting point for

the conception of Holy Scripture as the Word of God is the *Deus dixit* in Jesus Christ.

To this address scripture is a faithful witness.

a. The Scripture as the Recollection of the Past Revelation

The basic function of scripture in the church is that of recollection of past revelation. For this reason scripture should be very highly regarded in the church. Barth rejects the charge of 'biblicism' that was brought against him, namely that he disregarded the results of historical and textual criticism. Barth's problem however, was that criticism has not been critical enough. What Barth expects of a critical commentary is to go 'behind the text', since doing just a prolegomena to understanding the message of a certain biblical book is not sufficient.

Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter; till the document seems hardly to exist as a document; till I have almost forgotten that I am not the author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and I am even able to speak in his name myself (ER II:8).

The theologian does not speak of the Bible as a historian, but as a pastor 'confronted with the task of preaching' (ER II:8). He should dare to get deep into the text and through the text to the meaning. The 'meaning' for Barth is revelation itself, the event of hearing the Word of God.

In the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth answers the question why the scripture can be regarded as the Word of God. He conceives revelation in terms of speech. The propositional character of revelation is determined by the disclosure of God in revelation: 'We are directed not to God in himself, but to God in communicating himself' (GD:58). This principle applied to the Bible shows us what makes the Bible holy. It is not 'the correctness of the prophetic and apostolic statements and thought about God but the I-Thou encounter, person to person, about which these thoughts and statements tell us' (GD:58). This encounter requires involvement, without which 'God

is completely inconceivable, concealed and absent'. For Barth the participation of human words in God's Word is the principal element of the scripture principle of Protestantism. Human words are witnessing to Jesus Christ. The recognition of the special place of the witness of scripture is not a matter of individual experience. Certain Christian books can have great impact on people and speak to them more appealingly than the Bible itself. 'Yet the issue is not where we learn most, but where we learn the one thing, the truth. It is not a matter of arguing that the Bible is the finest book, but that it is the standard of all fine books' (GD:213). Its standard character is given by what is 'beyond' in the scripture, the Word of God, the revelation of God. The reality of revelation, then, is indirectly identical with the reality of scripture.

b. The Authority of the Scripture

The authority of the scripture lies in its inspiration (a gift from God) and its quality to be the first rank witness to the Word of God. These are recognised by the Church as such. The Bible has the authority of imposing itself upon us just because of its content as 'the prophetic and apostolic word, is the word and witness, proclamation and preaching of Jesus Christ' (CD I.1:106). This authority has been decisive also in the recognition of the Canon, which was the act of the Church, nevertheless not on the basis of its own authority. To look for the authority of the scripture in the realm of the text is a mistake, 'a blind alley' on the part of both liberalism and Protestant orthodoxy. Barth does not define the human words as being correct or without error. What he says is that the ambivalence of the Bible is necessary for the communication of the Word of God.

'The Bible cannot come to be God's Word if it is not this already' – everything Barth says can be paraphrased in this 'childishly simple statement'. This thought is based on Kierkegaard's idea of becoming. By 'becoming' Barth does not denote 'something on the way towards being or perfection'...but 'the other side of being', 'that

which flows from being, to being in action in time as it continuously becomes what it really is' (Torrance 1990:97, Cf Kierkegaard 1936:60). The fact that the scripture becomes the Word of God is recognised by the Church. The Spirit in the Church gives it the share in the revelation to which the biblical authors bear witness. The inspiration of the Spirit in today's believers is the same as the inspiration in the biblical authors. In this sense Barth regards 'inspiration as a single timeless – or rather contemporary act of God... it is an act in which the Spirit speaks to spirit, and spirit receives the Spirit' (GD:225). This doctrine is called the *doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit*. This principle might seem to some quite relative and subjective, but there is no other argument to establish the authority of the scripture and this is 'the one act of lordship which is grounded in God, which proceeds from God, and by [which] revelation is ours and we share in revelation' (GD:226).

In order to secure God's Word against all possibility of testing and rationalistic support Barth described the Word of God as having two characteristics: act and mystery. Revelation, then in Barth on the one hand is an event and not a transmission of dogmas, or of truths, but an act resulting in the alteration of persons who experience it. On the other hand, since revelation is mystery 'we must accept the fact that only the Logos of God Himself can provide the proof that we are really talking about Him when we are allegedly doing so' (CD I.1:162).

c. Scripture and Truth

The understanding of the authority of the scripture rests on how Barth perceives truth as an actual event.⁷ Truth is not defined in a rational and positive way, but existentially and it is placed in the sphere of faith. Truth, if it is really the Truth, has to be above all

⁷ Hunsinger makes an excellent exposition about how Barth understood truth in relation with 'reoccurring' motifs of his theology. Cf Hunsinger 1991:67ff.

historical and psychological contingency. The conception of truth defined during the time of writing *Romans II*, remained the same throughout Barth's dogmatic development.

Truth, in fact, can never be self-evident, because it is a matter of neither historical nor of psychological experience, and because it is neither a cosmic happening within the natural order, nor even the most supreme event of our imagining. Therefore it is not accessible to our perception ... Were it capable of such treatment, it would not be universally significant, it would not be the righteousness of God for the whole world, salvation for all men (ER II:98).

Barth argues that only God himself is the truth, the whole truth and 'every man a liar'. 'How could the statement that the Bible is the Word be proved in any other way than by an act of the free grace by which God *himself* makes the proof? Would it be the word of *God* if it could be verified except by Him?' (Barth 1935[1924]:244) Barth understands clearly that when this conception of truth was given up with the arrival of historical criticism and the 'guerrilla warfare in apologetics' began, 'the great misery of Protestantism' also has begun: 'doctrine, parted from its life-giving origin, hardened into *Orthodoxy*; Christian experience, confusing itself with this origin, took refuge in *Pietism*; truth no longer understood and actually no longer understandable, shrivelled into the moral sentimental maxims of the *Enlightenment*' (Barth 1935[1924]:246).

3. The Word of God as the Proclamation of the Church

Barth's idea of preaching being the Word of God rests on the presupposition that God acknowledges the preacher's venture and 'will himself speak as we speak, just as he spoke to the prophets and apostles and still speaks through them' (GD:265). The venture, or riddle of Christian preaching consist in the reception of God's address in his revelation and thus in the establishment of contemporaneity between revelation and us. In preaching the Word of God, the supreme authority in the church and the freedom of the individual are held in dialectical tension. The freedom consists in independent

thinking and a stating today of the thought of the scripture. 'The venture of Christian preaching is the act which is at one and the same time the act of the last and supreme authority of the church and an act of the last and supreme freedom of the individual' – said Barth (GD:267).

As we shall see below Barth's thought about the proclamation of the Word was the most popular aspect of his theology in Transylvania. References to this doctrine can be found in section VI.B.2 and VII.D.3. While the majority of the theologians followed Barth in describing the phenomenology of preaching Tavaszy emphasised more on the theological task of the Word of God.

a. Man's Role in Preaching

The preachers do not become a 'flute of the Holy Spirit', says Barth, but rather 'it is the Word of God that is inseparably bound up with their own word, the same Word of God that speaks in scripture, the same Word of God that the prophets and apostles themselves heard' (GD:268).

The Word of God is the criterion of proclamation; it judges and evaluates proclamation. As a criterion, God's Word functions differently from our use of criteria in evaluating human speech. We judge human speech by the nature of the speech and the concern of the speaker. But such a way of assessing would touch only the scientific or ethico-political character of proclamation. Barth does not see anything in the speech itself, which might indicate that in a particular address, God might reveal himself. 'Intrinsically proclamation as it takes place in preaching and sacrament presupposes that neither the nature of its object nor the situation or concern of the speaker is or can be so clear to any man as to put him in a position to pronounce on its truth' (CD I.1:92). What qualifies a sermon is what God does through it. For this reason Barth calls the Word of God the 'event itself in which proclamation becomes real proclamation' (CD I.1:93).

This is a miracle of faith, and as Barth says, 'we do not have much to explain, but to evaluate this miracle' (CD I.1:93). Barth compares human will and act in proclaiming with the double nature of Christ. As Christ is true man and true God, real proclamation becomes an event on the level of all human events, which has its own ambiguities from human side. 'Without the ambivalence and liability to misunderstanding it could not be real proclamation'. Using the Christological model Barth emphasises the 'new robe of righteousness' which is 'thrown on the human side and so it becomes a new event' (CD I.1:94).

b. Proclamation as Human Language about the Word of God

In Barth there is no material connection between the words of the preacher and the Word of God. The possibilities of the preacher to proclaim the Word of God lie not in himself, but in God. 'God is always the subject' – said Barth – 'this is the possibility or the condition under which we can talk about God' (GD:271).

Barth thought that the words of man even if expressed with utmost piety are not a guarantee that they will really be the ministry of God's Word. The pious words of the Christian preacher are always human words, but they may point to the fact that God has said something. God, however can make (theological) language 'the vehicle of analogical reference. In itself it is radically unlike the extra linguistic object to which it refers (God), but by grace it is made to transcend itself' (Hunsinger 1991:5). This is what Hunsinger called 'realism'. 'Through transcending itself by grace', says Hunsinger (1991:5), 'theological language attains sufficient likeness or adequacy to its object for reference truly and actually to occur'. Without this act of grace it might well be that this does not happen, 'that people are simply talking among themselves, and that with their loud noise they prevent others from hearing the divine voice.' That will happen 'is not decided by the piety

and Christianity which simply characterise the words as human, no matter how distinctively. It is decided by the relation to what God says.' (GD:283)

Proclamation then is a human language in and through which God himself speaks, like a king through the mouth of his herald. When human language about God raises this expectation, it does not do so by the logical form of the material content, of religious profundity and personal power. These only *serve* the Word of God. But the Word of God does not cease to be the Word of God because of this service. As it allows itself to be served by it, it is itself this human utterance, and as this human utterance serves it, it is itself God's own Word (CD I.1:51).

D. The Knowability of the Word of God – in Search for an Objective Knowledge of God

The nature of the knowledge of the Word of God in Barth's theology is determined by his actualistic understanding of being and of particularism and objectivism of revelation. According to Hunsinger (1991:4ff.), actualism determines the possibility and dynamic of knowing the Word of God, particularism emphasises Christ's role in revelation and objectivism underlines the mediated character of the knowledge of the Word of God. Based on this division we will discuss the possibility of knowing the Word of God, Barth's conception of natural theology and the concept of *analogia fidei*. Although these three motifs were always present in Barth's conception of revelation a shift in emphasis can be detected from actualism to particularism.

In the process of Barth's reception in Transylvania an important emphasis was given to the discussion about the objective existence and the objective knowledge of God. While Barth speaks about the objective knowledge of God, Géza Nagy stressed more on the objective existence, or reality of God (see section IV.C).

1. The Possibility of Knowing the Word of God

I already touched on the issue of the knowledge of God when we looked at Barth's response to neo-Kantian philosophy and we saw the way in which Barth could bridge the abyss of incomprehensibility of God (see section III.A.2.b). Here I deal with the way Barth thought the knowledge of God is possible.

In *Romans II* Barth developed the idea that man through natural resources is not able to know God. From revelation we know that God is the 'big unknown' for man;

we know that God is He whom we do not know, and our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of knowledge ... we know that God is the Personality, which we are not and that this lack of Personality is precisely what dissolves and establishes our personality (ER II:45).

This however, is knowledge of God without content; it is rather a knowing God as mystery. Commenting on Romans 1:19-21 Barth explains the phrase, 'that which may be known of God is manifested unto them' making use of Platonic philosophy. 'Plato in his wisdom recognised long ago that behind the visible lies the invisible universe which is the Origin of all concrete things' (ER II:46). In Barth's argument, the idea of Kierkegaard's theory on the existential teacher might be included.⁸ The knowledge of God is in our memory as a reflection of the prelapsarian state. 'Our memory of God accompanies us always as a problem and as a warning. He is the hidden abyss; but He is also the hidden home at the beginning and end of all our journeying (ER II:46). Barth explains the Biblical statement 'for the invisible things of God are clearly seen' along the lines of the thoughts above. Due to the fall, we have forgotten the invisible things of God (Idea) and we 'must allow it to be brought once more to our minds'. Our lack of recollection is inevitable in this fallen state. Barth thus links our lack of knowledge of

⁸ Kierkegaard (1936:62f.) compares Jesus and Plato as both being existential teachers, that is to teach us about how to live. The difference between them is that while Plato wants us to remind about what we already know as a reflection of our state before we were born, Jesus did not presupposes such an inherent knowledge in man. He brings us the knowledge from outside and changes us inwardly.

God, to the sinful state we are in which is different from the 'Origin', to the lack of knowledge of God's personality.

In *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth reflects on the knowability of God as God revealing himself to us as the 'irremovable subject'. The knowledge of God is not a philosophical question, but one that emerges from the fact of preaching. Barth says: 'we must bear in mind that on the basis of revelation we do have to reckon with this knowledge, that where revelation is, there this knowledge takes place, for us, to us, and in us (GD:328). This knowledge, however, indirect as it might be is an adequate and an objective knowledge. The objectivity of the knowledge is from the fact that knowledge corresponds with what God is. In this indirect, but objective knowledge of God is 'true knowledge... of the divine self-knowledge... in which we grasp ... the irreversible divine I in action' (GD:330).

In revelation we become the subjects of knowing God by faith and obedience and God becomes the object, 'by becoming man in Christ' (GD:330). This position is a step further from the position where Barth considered the era of revelation and disclosure when our world has been touched in Jesus Christ by the 'other world', which in fact 'ceases to be capable of direct observation as history' (ER II:30).

In order to have the knowledge of God faith and obedience is needed. This is so because humans lack the capacity to hear the Word since this capacity is given by the Word itself. 'The reality of the Word of God', says Barth 'is grounded only in itself. So, too, the knowledge of it by man can consist only in its acknowledgement, and this acknowledgement can become real only through itself, and can become intelligible only in terms of itself' (CD I.1:187). This means that the Word of God can only be heard in the event of the Word of God which does not presuppose but brings with itself the possibility of hearing.

2. Natural Theology and the Knowledge of the Word of God

Barth rejects the idea of natural theology,⁹ which he notes is sometimes regarded as 'natural revelation' on the basis of three considerations: the content, locus and hiddenness of the Word of God.

(i.) The *content* of the Word of God is God himself revealed as the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 'But as God solely and wholly reveals himself, he makes himself known in the three persons of his essence' (GD:87). God is not just half revealed or partly revealed 'here a bit and there a bit'. It is a false humility to suppose that what is revealed is only a drop in the 'ocean of God'. This presupposition would rest on 'falsely equating revelation with revealedness to us, instead of thinking of it as a revelation in act, in God's act.' Revelation is either the whole revelation of God, or it is not revelation. Fragmentation of revelation and its division into natural and special revelation is a 'contradiction in terms, an anthropomorphism, a basic naturalisation of revelation' (GD:92). God is the source of truth, which cannot be 'a particle of truth. It is either the whole truth or it does not go back to God and is not revelation at all'. The voice natural theology supposes to hear in fact comes from this world and stands over against revelation.

What man says that he knows of God, apart the Word of God, can 'never be measured or compared with what the Holy Scripture calls *God*... what is God to the natural man... is a false god' (CD II.1:86). According to Barth if 'natural revelation' were genuine revelation we should give up the uniqueness of revelation.

(ii.) The *locus* where the Word of God is spoken also excludes natural revelation and natural theology. This locus today is church proclamation. It is true that humans

⁹ The volume of the discussion about this topic in the theological literature is impressive. For our purpose it is sufficient to give a short account of it here and avoid the discussion of the well known debate between Barth and Brunner (Brunner and Barth 2002[1934]).

cannot limit God in his freedom to address people. He can speak through nature, through history, through 'Handel's Largo and all kinds of good art' (GD:33). Nevertheless, these possibilities need to be left 'to God's omnipotence'. 'That the Word of God based on revelation and scripture might meet us in a green forest or symphony concert is a remote possibility that has to be pondered rather more carefully than usually happens when it is maintained' – says Barth (GD:34). We however need to take seriously the commission given to us and the place where we are addressed: the church. This locus is like the centre of a circle from which the possibility of hearing God can take place, but we are commissioned to take seriously the centre and not to wander along the periphery.

(iii.) For Barth revelation is not possible without incarnation, which determines its *hiddenness* in the world. God's revelation in this world can be only concealed; otherwise it would not be God's revelation. This conception, however, leads to 'the radical de-divinization of the world and nature and history, the complete divine incognito.' Barth considered that

the logic of the matter demands that, even if we only lend our little finger to natural theology, there necessarily follows the denial of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. A natural theology, which does not strive to be the only master, is not a natural theology and to give it place at all is to put oneself, even if unwittingly, on the way which leads to this sole sovereignty (CD II.1:173).

3. Analogia Fidei

The publication of the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* is regarded as a watershed of Barth's theological development. His in-depth study of St. Anselm's *Proslogion* and

his argument for the existence of God helped him to articulate the dogmatic shift in his theology which has begun to take place some years earlier.¹⁰

In the footsteps of Anselm Barth learned that the argument for faith is possible from an *a priori* 'possession' of divine revelation. This argument gave Barth good insights into the phenomenon of *faith seeking understanding*. Anselm argued that the nature of faith to ask for understanding (*intelligere*) and not proof (*probare*). From the basis of a pre-existent faith, and from the already-present knowledge of God's name, which is taken from the *Credo*, it is possible to deduce that God is *aliquid quo nihil cogitari possit* (something beyond which nothing greater can be conceived) (Barth 1960[1931]:20ff.). 'Starting from this point of the *Credo*, ... the existence of God must make itself – not credible (since it is already) – but intelligible' (Barth 1960[1931]:78).

Barth also uses this concept in order to secure his idea of the Word of God against any kind of positivistic argument that would explain away the whole concept of God's Word and that of revelation. As one who has faith, Anselm has the *esse Dei* in his intellect by revelation, and this means that God is not 'just a vain intention but an object that is known'. Barth uses this idea and says that God can be known objectively. But this is not to say that God is the object of *our* knowledge. God is always the subject, but he gives himself to be known by us objectively (Barth 1960[1931]:152). For Anselm knowledge is objective if the object of knowledge exists not only in mind but also in truth. Barth, having in mind the knowability of the Word of God, describes knowledge in general as being the 'confirmation of acquaintance' of an object 'with its reality in

¹⁰ McCormack (1995:422) thinks that 'the book on Anselm does not give expression to a *revolution* in Barth's thought; there is no new starting point to be found'. With the CD Barth continues his theological method which is set forth already in GD. Barth's book on Anselm is about to show 'what it means to *demonstrate rationally* in theology', that this is in fact 'thinking after' (McCormack 1995:428).

respect of its existence and its nature' (CD I.1:188). Thus our knowledge of God is objective since the knowledge we have about him is analogous with his reality.

Barth applies the analogy of faith to the knowability of the Word of God. The question of knowability of God in the Church is taken for granted (not in the sphere of human existence in general). The existence of proclamation implies that some people know the Word of God. Barth defines knowledge in terms of acquaintance. Knowledge is the fact that 'the reality of the object, its existence and nature being true in themselves, now become in some way, and with some degree of clarity and distinctness, true for men too' (CD I.1:188).

In this definition the mode in which acquaintance is achieved is not clearly defined, since no one can describe the dynamics of knowing the Word of God. What one can say is that God in *some way*, in the mystery of the event of the Word of God makes himself known. The question here is not how do we know, but rather how *can* we know? In this way Barth turns the metaphysical question of the knowability of the Word of God into an anthropological one. The Word of God is conceived as an event, and man's possibilities and capacities 'do not correspond logically and materially to this event'. Man does not have any innate disposition or faculty in Kantian terms, for the Word of God. The event of knowing God's Word is contingent on the free grace of God.

The analogy of faith enters as a new element in how Barth understands faith and tames the exclusiveness of the dialectical language; the idea of faith appears which brings with itself a certain kind of conformity to God. This has nothing to do with the idea of deification of the Eastern Orthodox theology; it is only to say that in faith 'man becomes apt to receive' the Word of God.

There can be no receiving of God's Word unless there is something common to the speaking God and hearing man in this event, a similarity for all the dissimilarity implied by the distinction between God and man, a point of contact between God and man (CD I.1:238).

The recognition of the need for the idea of conformity (or analogy) is quite significant here. As a new element in Barth's thinking it shows the recognition of the need of such presupposition for taking seriously the question of nature as God's creation, all the questions implied in the idea of revelation. The term 'point of contact' must not be understood in the way implied by natural theology. Barth does not agree with Brunner when he refers to humanity as retaining something from creation, for 'the humanity and personality of sinful man cannot possibly signify conformity to God, a point of contact for the Word of God' (CD I.1:138). For Barth the image of God in man is obliterated as a means of knowing God, and if we today can use this concept at all, we mean by it only the fact that man in grace can hear God's Word and not as a natural capacity.

E. Jesus Christ the Light of the World

Barth in his treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.1¹¹ reached the full development of his analogy of faith. God and man are bound to live together in an unprecedented way as far as Barth's theology is concerned. 'As Jesus Christ lives, God and man live in this conjunction. We do not have God here and man there; God is the God of man and man the man of God. *This is the epitome of the whole order of creation.*' (CD IV.3.1:43 italics added) The living together of God and man has a redemptive character; it is more than the order of creation is the order of reconciliation, order of 'the free mercy' of God. Since Jesus Christ is not only the revealer of God, the Word of God, but also our redeemer whose life establishes the new order of grace, revelation and redemption is closely linked together: there is no knowledge of God apart from the life in God.

¹¹ Barth published this volume in 1959, ET in 1963.

The proposition 'Jesus Christ lives' means that he has a particular history. Its particularity resides in the fact that this history is perichoretically bounded together with his eternal life and is contemporaneous to all historical moments of the creatures. The life of Jesus

as the life of grace, it is also that of nature. As the life of the Saviour, it is also that of the faithful Creator... who is 'not far from every one of us', but in whom as His creatures 'we live, and move, and have our being' (CD IV.3.1:43).

This unique life of Jesus Christ qualifies him to be 'present to each and every human being as such, as the luminous Word which discloses the particular history of his one life action for what it is; reconciliation, the mediating centre of all things in relation to God' (Hunsinger 1991:243).

1. Jesus Christ the Only Light

The statement: 'Jesus Christ is the light of life', for Barth also means that the Word of God is the 'one and only light of life'. This statement has two aspects: 'Positively, this means that He is the light of life in its fullness, in perfect adequacy; and negatively, it means that there is no other light of life outside or alongside His, outside or alongside the light which He is' (CD IV.3.1:86). Barth makes it clear that he thinks of recognising that Jesus Christ is not only 'the clearest', a 'particularly important one', or 'one of great urgency' for us, but he is the only one (CD IV.3.1:87).

However emphatic Barth's statement would appear, he does not exclude the possibility or actuality of 'lesser lights'. Hunsinger thought that

What the pre-eminence of the one great light excludes is not other lights as such, but rather certain impossible moods of relationship between the one and the many. Two moods in particular are excluded. No other light of life may be conceived as being *outside*, and no other as being *alongside*, the one great light (Hunsinger 1991:243).

Barth in determining the relationship between Jesus Christ as the only light with 'other lights' stresses on the normativity, superiority and uniqueness of the one light

vis-à-vis 'other light'. These evaluating principles, says Barth help us to conclude that 'it is perhaps incontestable that there are real light of life and words of God' in the inner sphere of the church and outer sphere of the world 'He alone is the Word of God even here, and these lights shine only because of the shining of none other light than His' (CD IV.3.1:96). Barth thus does not deny the validity and truthfulness of other words than the Word of God, but he says that these exist through Jesus Christ. But these good words in themselves are not the Word of God, and none can be put beside Jesus Christ the word spoken by God. Jesus Christ is 'the only Word which all human words, even the best, can only directly or indirectly attest, but not replace or rival, so that their goodness and authority are to be measured by whether or not, and with what fidelity, they are witnesses of this one Word' (CD IV.3.1:96). Christ, the Word of God is the 'truth in all fullness and perfection', other truths can be derivative of this truth but he is the original truth and sovereign above all truths. There is no 'third side to any serious competition any challenge to His truth, any threat to His authority' (CD IV.3.1:100). Any true word spoken by man is 'rudiment' or 'fragment' when divorced from the contextual whole established by the concrete life of Jesus Christ, and say 'in their isolation and absoluteness something very different from the Word' (CD IV.3.1:108). The content of the Word of God makes it unique and incomparable with other words in the world.

2. Jesus Christ and Other Lights

The treatment of 'other lights' – parables of the Word of God and the true words of nature, as Barth calls them – can be considered the positive side of his 'Nein!' uttered in the debate with Brunner, and indeed this is what he puts in place of natural revelation. Barth himself does not make a distinction between 'natural revelation' (or natural theology) and 'general revelation'. I would regard natural revelation to denote a

permanent endowment of knowledge of God through the world as God's creation and humanity – a static idea. I would consider 'general revelation' denoting a more dynamic concept, being God's activity of self-disclosure in human consciousness known more generally than in the church alone; to this category belong the other lights Barth is talking about.

The true words of man *extra muros ecclesiae* measured by the criteria of the Word, like their dependency, being distinguished and commissioned by the word – are called by Barth *parables of the Word of God*. As the biblical parables were used by Jesus to convey the kingdom of God, in the same way the true words are used by the Word of God to convey its own meaning. These (secular) 'parables' are the secondary forms of the Word of God and can exist both in and outside of the church.

Barth accepts the reflection of the 'only light of the world' in nature, too. The cosmos as the *theatrum gloriae* is seen christologically, since, Barth says, it was called out to be the theatre of 'the location and background' of Jesus Christ's life and work (reconciliation). 'The creaturely world... has also as such its own lights and truths and therefore its own speech'. This voice can be heard or missed but nevertheless it speaks. Nature's self witness and light is neither extinguished by the corruption of man nor by the light of Jesus Christ, but it shines 'during and after the epiphany of Jesus Christ' (CD IV.3.1:139). Barth insists that the world created by God is a 'text' which can be understood, and man is its reader and expositor. The world is God's created light, and together with true words spoken in it shine, although not with the same brightness as God shines in 'His Word or as the Word has in His sight and knowledge, nevertheless they bring illumination. They prevent the world from being merely dark, or being plunged into absolute gloom by the sin of man' (CD IV.3.1:141). The common feature of the light of the nature is 'to point to something lasting, persistent and constant' (CD IV.3.1:142). The word of nature, however, has nothing to do with the word of

reconciliation, the word of prophecy through Jesus Christ. They rather speak of the order in the cosmos and 'resist the onslaught of gloom'. The existence of this light 'does not end the moral strife of man against God, or save him from death'. This is the reason Barth does not call this light 'revelation', since there is no need of faith to grasp them, only 'a limited gift of common sense' (CD IV.3.1:143). Barth is consistent here with his actualistic view of revelation which always regards revelation as an I-Thou encounter between subjects. For this reason revelation cannot be a rational proposition about God even if it is derived from the 'created lights' or 'true words' in the word.

The created world needs only to be regarded as the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, as a 'setting or background' of the event of revelation. Barth, although making a sharp distinction between the *gloriae Dei* and the *theatrum*, considers that the self-declaration of God does not take 'place in an empty and indefinite sphere'; the relationship between the two is one of inclusion rather than exclusion. But God and the world does not exist in the same manner: 'They co-exist in such a way that in free grace God gives it to the world that it should be what it is as such in the way it is, deriving its own being and existence only from the gift' (CD IV.3.1:152). This co-existence makes the pattern of the relationship between the one light and the many, created by Him. 'They cannot be compared or considered together as though for all their difference they were only two rays from one and the same light, or two sides, aspects or parts of one and the same truth' (CD IV.3.1:152). Such thinking would imply a common source reality of which God and the world would be two manifestations. Barth rejects such 'Gnosticism' since God is the creator of the world, truth which makes a very different consideration of the light of God and the lights that shine in the world. Jesus Christ is not 'mere an irruption of a higher light', a mere expression of truth, 'but the one true light of the one truth above or alongside which there can be no other, rival truth' (CD IV.3.1:152).

F. Conclusion

In this chapter we have made an attempt to follow Karl Barth's theological development in connection with his doctrine of the Word of God. I have tried to outline the content of Barth's theology with the intention of providing the necessary knowledge base for understanding the Transylvanian theologians, but I also touched on those thought and issues which actually or potentially came to surface in the process of Barth's reception in Transylvania. For this reason I have dealt with issues such as neo-Kantianism, the reality of God, the objective knowledge of God.

We have seen that there is a clear line of development in Barth's thought. He first put the Word and man, Jesus Christ and history in such an opposition that his theology suffered from this dialectical tension. Later Barth made an attempt to loose this tension by giving a new understanding to the dialectical method. By applying the concept of 'analogia fidei' he could bring the Christological method to full victory and through this he was able to express better the 'humanity of God' (Barth 1967[1956]:33ff.) and his saving grace in Jesus Christ.

It is clear that Barth's theological enterprise unfolded in its full positive power only towards the end of his life. This fact draws our attention to the fact that the reception of early Barth in Transylvania was not an encounter with the fully developed Barthian thought. There are historical reasons for this, such as the social and political disturbances brought by World War II, the Second Vienna Award and the establishment of Communism in Romania. The encounter with mere the early Barth however has its consequences not only in the dogmatic history of Transylvania but in the life of the church as well. Barth's later thought about Christ as 'light of the world' offers possibilities for a positive relation of human cultural life to the Word of God, and so for a Christological understanding of 'general revelation'. But this was neither known by

the Transylvanian Reformed theologians in the 1930s and 1940s nor discovered in the subsequent decades.

CHAPTER IV

THREE MODELS OF INTERPRETING KARL BARTH'S RECEPTION IN TRANSYLVANIA

In this chapter I intend to analyse the way that Karl Barth's theology was understood by different theologians and how they related to its reception in Transylvania. To make the work easier I suggest using different 'models' of the reading and reception of Barth's theology of the Word of God. For each model I recommend a representative person. Theologians admitted that they modified their position at least slightly if not significantly during the years. Here, however, I concentrate on their position in the mid 1920s and early 30s. This study is important since it shows not only the theological position of the individual theologians, but at the same time reflects the theological program alongside which certain theologians conceived the theological and ecclesiastical renewal of the Reformed church. The consideration of the initial intentions is important since we can compare them with what had settled down by the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. I am aware of the fact that certain theologians cannot be locked into one model or other, but what I want to claim is that their ideas are more congenial with one model or the other. I want to emphasise that a 'model' represents a way of looking at dialectical theology and does not classify a certain theologian entirely according to a certain model.

A. Dialectical Theology – A New Reformation

Some theologians hailed dialectical theology as a new theology that brings along the much desired reformation of the church. This is why they called dialectical theology 'new reformation theology'. The main representative of this model was Sándor Tavaszy.

Sándor Tavaszy (1888-1951) was among the greatest figures of Hungarian Protestantism in the twentieth century. In 1919 he had begun lecturing at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár in the area of history and psychology of religion. In 1920 he became the church history professor at the Faculty, and between 1924 and 1932 he was also the president of this establishment. After an initial liberal theological position, in the 1920s he began to turn more and more to Calvin and the confessional writings of the Reformed church. He found Calvin and his theology a solid and healthy basis for much needed theological reform and church revival and in this preoccupation he became acquainted with the new theological situation in Germany and with Karl Barth's work. At the end of the 20s he was convinced by his theology and started to promote a theology of the Word inspired by Barth's position. His *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*, published in 1932 was his most mature theological work.

In this chapter I am only dealing with those ideas in his thinking that show his overall evaluation of Barthian thought.¹ Tavaszy saw in the 'victorious advance' of dialectical theology a natural and a necessary phenomenon, that is to set aside liberal theological thinking dominated by the emphasis on 'human experience', and to bring a

¹ Tavaszy (1931c:272) also calls it modern orthodoxy in the sense that in Barth's theology the object of theology is not 'the immanent phenomenon of religion but transcendental revelation'.

new reformation.² 'The concrete messages of dialectical theology', says Tavaszy, 'are for a specific and concrete situation, and through these messages dialectical theology fulfils a prophetic mission' (1929a:3). This prophetic mission was with the aim of changing the present situation in Protestant theology.

1. A New Way Out of the Crisis

Tavaszy adopted Barth's critique of the Enlightenment, which caused – he said – today's worldview to be characterised by exclusive rationalism, immanentism, humanism, empiricism and historical relativism. As a result of this thinking up to the beginning of the twentieth century four major theological trends persisted which could not help the Christian church to overcome the spirit of Enlightenment: critical liberalism, the neo-Kantian-Ritschlian theology, psychological theology and the study of religion school. He criticised these theological trends in harmony with Barth's ideas (Tavaszy 1929d:2ff.).

Tavaszy considered that the common characteristic of theological trends at the turn of the century was that their main concern was directed towards the *general* category of religion, and all of them considered Christian religion to be a part of that 'general religion-idea'. Although all trends found 'special' characteristics in Christianity, as the special manifestation of religion, these characteristics were really part of the general religion-idea as well.

Tavaszy's analysis, in similarity to Barth's, showed that the theological crisis of his days was characterised by features such as the following:

² Béla Kiss also thinks that the best expression for the theology promoted by Barth is 'new reformation' since in it 'the main features of reformation are most adequately expressed'. Kiss 1936:246 in footnote 1.

- the highest forum in theology is not the revelation of God any more, but scientific speculation;
- theology has given up the aim of accomplishing its own goal according to its specific method;
- this kind of theology has lost touch with the church and lives a parallel life, in spite of the fact that theology has its validity only in the church;
- it has also lost touch with life, because it has not been able to fulfil its testifying role, or to pass this duty over to practical theology.

Tavaszy in 1929 presents Barth's theology as it is taking shape in *Romans II*[1922], and *The Word of God and Theology*[1924]. The spirit of the article is one of rejoicing about the victorious advance of a new reformation theology.

In today's Protestant theology, against a still dominant liberal minded theology, with increasing victory an objective, reformation-minded transcendental theology makes way for itself... human 'experience' and divine 'revelation' are the poles around which these two trends are located (Tavaszy 1929d:5).

Tavaszy appreciated Barth's theology as a new trend since in his theology the transcendental element gained ground in contrast to the subjective character of former schools. He thought Barth would reject the qualification 'transcendental' in connection with his theology, but he still believed that this is the expression that reflects best the new-reformation orientation. Istvan Juhász observed that Tavaszy formulated a new theological program for the Reformed church in the light of the new theology:

We need to change entirely the whole of religious thinking, we need to get rid of our anthropocentric approach and follow rigorously the clear theocentric approach, which makes it impossible to put God in men's service and which excludes any conception of Christ's work from a point of view of human advantage (in Juhász I 1966:344).

2. A New Understanding of Religious Experience

Closely related to the crisis of theology is the problem of revelation and human experience. The task of a new theology has to be to clarify the relationship that exists between revelation and experience, and dialectical theology is able to do it – thinks Tavaszy. He acknowledged Schleiermacher's role in the establishment of the modern concept of religious experience, but his opinion is that Schleiermacher's system is closer to psychological theology than to critical liberalism and 'this is why today when transcendental theology is about to step forward with its entire vigour, Schleiermacher is the main point of issue' (Tavaszy 1929d:12).

Dialectical theology, that Tavaszy called 'transcendental theology', generally condemned Schleiermacher's view on religion and revelation and breaking his dominance re-established the reformation view of the Word of God. Tavaszy defined experience through Karl Böhm's concepts; 'experience is that which the I encounters as its own act and its change' (Tavaszy 1929d:12).³ From this definition Tavaszy defines four characteristics of experience: it has a subjective origin; it is an immanent-human act; it is a change in time; it is relative as it depends on definite factors in its emergence and its realisation. Analyzing these characteristics Tavaszy negates the truth-value of experience which is

entirely a psychological concept, and he who looks for the truth, content and reality of Evangelical Christianity according to the nature of psychological investigation will find himself facing all sorts of religious encounters, in an empirical progression whose end he will never reach. For this reason he will never gain and never possess the truth, content and reality of Evangelical Christianity (Tavaszy 1929d:12).

³ Tavaszy quotes from Böhm's inaugural speech to the membership of the Hungarian Academy of Science entitled 'A megértés, mint a megismerés központi mozzanata' [Understanding as the Central Momentum of Knowing], published by the Academy in 1910, in *Essays in the Science of Philosophy*, vol. III. Nr. 1.

The 'encounter Christianity' – that looks after inward experience – is very close to mystical experience. This experience is 'dangerous' to Christianity, because there is a momentum in it when the mystic is detached from Jesus Christ, as he becomes unnecessary for the experience. In this way religious experience, in Tavaszy's view, is not the 'deepening of an inner relationship with God ... but rather [human] spirit-deification, and a trembling holy reverence before the mere inner world of man' (Tavaszy 1929d:14). In such a religiosity Tavaszy observed that the goals and preoccupations of the believers remain inside the circle of humanity, and that divinity, true theocracy, is entirely absent. The aim of this practice is not the humble veneration of God, but 'self indulgence, delight in oneself, self-complacency, nay self-sufficiency' (Tavaszy 1929d:16). Tavaszy after five years of the appearance of *The Word of God and Theology* [1924] considers that Barth's ideas about the Christian piety bring forward a new concept of religious experience and restore the biblical concept of piety in which everything depends on God.

[N]ot man has the initiative before God, but all initiative belongs to God; not the salvation of man, but God's righteousness and glory is what biblical piety is looking at, and even salvation is a consequence of this goal. The only human correlate to the fullness of godly life is not enthusiasm, neither love nor virtue, but fear of God – even a deadly fear. The beginning of any faith, piety, or Christianity is the fear of God (Tavaszy 1929d:18).

This teaching is not new in itself, because it corresponds with the teaching of the Reformers – observes Tavaszy. They taught that nobody can search for God if God had not found the person already; and only those who had found Him can truly search for Him. Dialectical theology is right when it affirms that revelation appears in our world without any human initiative, says Tavaszy and by so doing it is the beginning of a new theological era (Tavaszy 1929d:18f).

3. A New Understanding of Spirituality and of Revelation

Historically speaking, 'religion as a human possibility discredited revelation, while today the recognition of revelation discredits religion', by the simple fact that revelation unmasks religion, because it became judgement on it, as on 'all other human endeavours' (Tavaszy1929a:39). This Barthian idea is justified by Tavaszy and applied in a critique of the two main forms of Christian spirituality perceived in Transylvania at that time which emerging from a liberal, towards a more evangelical approach. Although these two movements are seen in constant contradiction, says Tavaszy, there is a basic agreement between them. They consider that the gravity of Christian life is on the human side 'and man is able to build up his faith according to his own desire and his own need of salvation' (Tavaszy 1929d:31). I outline Tavaszy's position on the two forms of spirituality.

(i.) Religion, as a *human enterprise* is more or less identical with morals, science, art, or rational truth. It is a human concept like the others in which we see the manifestation of human spirit. Man practising such religion lives either in his own morality based on rational insights which are penetrated and coloured by specific aesthetic ideas, or in his subjective, emotional impulses and mystical experiences. In accordance with the understanding of religion as a human enterprise, religion is either a rational world-view, penetrated by aesthetic and mystical ideas, or an emotional self-fulfilment in which the mystic of self-worship may play an important role. The main concern of liberal Christianity after all is not to build up a life-communion with Christ but the building up of individual thoughts into a comprehensive religious world view. For this reason in the centre of its attention there are the ideas of human spirit, freedom and progress. Liberal Christianity is a clear object-lesson of man's Titanism because in its view man's freedom reaches even up to God. In liberalism

any transcendent reality is excluded, there is not any eternal mystery in it any more, because human reason trusting in itself dissolves all mystery. Man stands before God and before His will as before a givenness, an objective reality, in the false-belief that this givenness, this objective reality can be pinned down like any givenness or objective reality, that its possession by knowledge happens in the same way [like that of other objects], namely through a human decision, human will or rational comprehension (Tavaszy 1929d:33).

(ii.) Something similar is going on in the pious '*fellowship-Christianity*'. The difference is that in piety the emphasis is not placed on the worldview-forming activity of reason, but on subjective feelings and enthusiasm deepened in the self. Man and his subjective interests are in the foreground. The Word of God, the saving work of Christ in its every detail, is made dependent by subjective experience of the individual. Both liberalism and pietism are individualistic and reacting against the true idea of the church.

In my opinion Tavaszy overstressed his critique of '*fellowship Christianity*'. He is quite ambiguous and the reader is not sure whether he speaks about a liberal understanding of religious experience or he has in mind the evangelical trend in Transylvania. His critique is more a reflection on a German/Swiss situation which echoes Barth's critique rather than an objective evaluation of the situation in Transylvania. We shall see in the next section, that one of Makkai's arguments about the redundancy of dialectical theology was that in Transylvania 'there is no need to fight against subjective and romantic spirituality, there is no need to criticise experience-Christianity' (Juhász I 1966:346). To equate the evangelical trend of the day with pietism in Barth's sense is oversimplification of the matter and suspects tendentious exaggeration.

The new concept of religion in dialectical theology – says Tavaszy – rests not on human deliberation but on God's initiative, namely his desire to reveal Himself. The concept of spirituality rests on the concept of revelation. Dialectical theology, affirms

Tavaszy, rejects the idea and practice that in religion the Word of God may be put after human 'principles' and 'ideas'. Christian life is only there where its way is not barricaded by human thoughts, plans and ideas; God is only there where he himself creates the possibility of his presence in the revelation of his Word.

In this way 'religion' changes into obedience and gives priority to revelation, it loses its humanistic character and in content becomes a 'gift', 'forgiveness', 'new birth', 'justification' and 'sanctification'. Hence as far as in religion as human creation the subject of the whole 'religious life', as a matter of fact, is man, and God is only the mere object, in religion as God's gift the subject, lord, leader and king of Christian life is God. (Tavaszy 1928b:17).

4. A New Theological Method

Dialectical theology compared to previous trends takes a different approach to theological discourse – says Tavaszy. Following Barth he calls this approach 'the Pauline-Reformation way' (Tavaszy 1929a:25, see Barth 1935[1924]:206). Theological thinking, says Tavaszy, must be dialectical since man is unable to make direct assertions about God. There is an abyss between man and God, and if man lives in God's presence that life by nature is dialectical in character. Man is not able to speak directly about truth. For this reason theology is of a dialectical nature, it 'is not the truth itself or a systematic exposition of the truth, but only a witness about the truth, which is always between two propositions *in der Mitte*' (Tavaszy 1929a:28). By this *Mitte*, dialectical theology understands the truth itself that is between two assertions, beyond 'Yes' and 'No' (Barth 1935[1924]:209). In order to accept this definition of truth we need to change our view about the truth itself. It is not us who grasp the truth, says Tavaszy, it grasps us. Truth is not something theoretical but, according to Bultmann,⁴ is a happening, an action. Barth too, speaks not only about 'Mitte' but about 'lebendige Mitte'. Tavaszy realises that in Bultmann's definition of the truth of the Word of God a

⁴ He quotes Bultmann, 'Die Frage der "dialektischen" Theologie in Z. d Z. 13. Heft.

strong existential element gained ground and by this realisation Tavaszy is also driven to a more existential approach in theology (see section VI.C.2).

Tavaszy also realises that the dialectical method used by dialectical theology is different from the Hegelian dialectic which is a tool for speculation to rule above the irrational. In philosophy truth has become an abstract theoretical concept by means of dialectic. The dialectic of dialectical theology, however, is of an entirely different nature.

The method of dialectical theology lies in the insight, that its object, revelation, is not a givenness that can be deduced from a principle ... Revelation in all its aspects contradicts human thinking, for this reason man is able to talk about it only by means of contradicting concepts and words, words beyond which the concepts are different not only in quantity but quality. It can be concluded that theologising is possible only by means of a dialogue, namely dialectic (Tavaszy 1929a:28).

The abandonment of analogical thinking in favour of a dialectical one seemed to some Transylvanians the end of scientific method.⁵ This is not so, said Tavaszy, and theology can be maintained as a scientific discipline. For that matter dialectical theology was keen to present theology as a scientific disciple (Tavaszy 1929a:28 and CD I.1 3f., 275ff.). The issue of the scientific character of theology was of considerable importance in the reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania. At the first public debate about dialectical theology, during the 'Barth conference' in 1930 in Nagyenyed, the scientific character of dialectical theology was among the main issues. As we have seen value theology had entertained the hope of the possibility of a 'scientific theology'. It was affirmed at the conference that dialectical theology makes a correction in the understanding of this character, too. Modern liberal theology – says Tavaszy – works with the same science concept as natural sciences, according to which science is the

⁵ Béla Tankó [1931:264] sharply criticised dialectical theology, especially Barth, for its alleged lack of scientific character: 'in the place of scholarly work, by means of the arguments of science the impossibility of science is put to serve the alleged interests of faith and religion'.

system of positive knowledge about the facts (Tavaszy 1931b:25). Those who want to apply this concept of science to theology need to consider that in theology we are not faced with facts in the sense of natural sciences, but with the revelation of God. The issues theology is dealing with are not under our control and we cannot rule over them like in natural sciences. When dialectical theology refers to the 'scientific character of theology', it only says that a logically justified science concept demands that each discipline should proceed in the way demanded by its object. It is impossible to force a unique science-concept upon all disciplines. Theology does not give up its claim to be science, but it does not accept working with the science-concept of natural sciences; 'theology can not perform a *splendid isolatio* in the economy of sciences' – says Tavaszy – 'nevertheless it must learn to follow its own rules in its own house' (Tavaszy 1931b:26).

5. Conclusion

The 'new era' approach to dialectical theology emphasised the discontinuity with the existing theological tradition. In this view dialectical theology condemns what was there before and attempts to introduce a new theology both in form and content. Understanding dialectical theology by this model may however result in a levelling effect leading to a simplified view of the indigenous theological tradition and overlooking its richness and complexity.

Referring to the 'new way out of crisis' tends to overlook, *first* the differences in the nature of crisis that might have been in a German context and the Hungarian context in Transylvania, and *secondly* the possible existence of other understanding and attempts to solve a critical situation. The resurgence of Confessional Calvinism was such an attempt, and overlooking its results created tension between certain circles of church leaders.

This model also overlooks the fact that certain formulations in different contexts might mean different things. An example of this is the condemning term of 'religious experience'. It cannot be denied that in Transylvania there might have been some Protestant Christians whose experience would fit Barth's description of illusory experience. However in Transylvania there were people who were sincere believers – especially those who followed the Puritan tradition – whose 'experience' was genuine by the standard of the Word of God.⁶ It seems that Tavaszy took over from Barth a critique of Pietism without the necessary translation of the concept into the Hungarian situation (see also Tavaszy 1929d:41). As a matter of fact, as we shall see below, this model was not consequently followed, even by Tavaszy himself. Nevertheless a lack of careful consideration and the use of slogans derived from the conclusion of this model could have served both as hindrance and incentive for an evangelical spirituality. We shall deal with the theological development of Sándor Tavaszy in Chapter VI.

B. Dialectical Theology – A Mere Correction of the Dominant Theological Trend

Sándor Makkai, a strong promoter of Confessional Calvinism, initially resisted the acceptance of dialectical theology as a new trend and saw in it only the correction of the actual theological position which was itself fighting against the lifelessness caused by liberalism. At the theological consultation in Nagyenyéd in 1930, the first public debate on dialectical theology, he also expressed his opinion. 1930 was the year when Barth has moved to his second teaching position in Germany and he soon expresses in his

⁶ As we shall see in the next section, Makkai also used this argument at the theological conference in Nagyenyéd in 1930. Tavaszy, however, could not accept it, and he went on to accuse the newly emerging free churches (in Transylvania usually called 'cults') that they are the 'outstanding examples of delight in subjective experience and religious hedonism'. Tavaszy also referred to sermons 'full of experience-analysis', sermons which were spoken in the spirit of liberal Romanticism. Cf. Tavaszy 1930:138.

book on Anselm and the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* his more Christ-centred dogmatic teaching. In Transylvania in 1930 at the conference at Nagyenyed Barth's first phase of theological thinking was presented. Sándor Makkai's lecture delivered at this conference remained in manuscript form, but Tavaszy published an extended outline of it based on his own conference notes (Tavaszy 1930).

Makkai's main attempt was to put dialectical theology into context. He admitted later that at the time of the conference he was not familiar enough with dialectical theology; he knew about it only from Sándor Tavaszy's essays (Makkai 1990:116). He was more interested in the early years of dialectical theology in Transylvania with regard to its cultural context than in its actual context in Switzerland. His basic principle was that the Transylvanian situation was different from the Swiss one, so dialectical theology could not be of much value in Transylvania. Tavaszy rejected Makkai's argument since it 'makes the task of theology into serving its modifying factors' (Tavaszy 1930:138).

According to Makkai, dialectical theology in Transylvania can serve only as a correction of the existing theological trend. This is due to several factors. The first is that it is *anti-cultural* and is not interested in detailed scientific knowledge (Tavaszy 1930:136). We may well think that Makkai's charge of anti-culturalism is a serious one, since the Reformed church in Transylvania always felt that it was its duty to foster the minority culture. In many difficult historical situations, like that of interwar period, there were no other institutions for the people to rely on except the church. A theological trend, which does not consider this historical fact and appears in anti-cultural dress, was suspicious from the very beginning.

The second factor is that according to Makkai dialectical theology *cannot bring anything new* to Transylvania (Tavaszy 1930:137). That some of the Transylvanian theologians have accepted it so easily is because in Transylvania the same theological

and reform program is proceeding as in Switzerland. The idea behind this argument is that both the Barthian dialectical theology and Transylvanian Confessional Calvinism are based on the same Reformed foundation and each attempt to actualise Reformation in its own context. This for Makkai also meant that dialectical theology, as it is, is not suitable in Transylvania, since it was born in a different context – where it is effective indeed – since the effectiveness of a theology is always related to its context. To demonstrate his point Makkai says that in Transylvania there is no need to fight either against subjective and experience-based Christianity, since it is not a threat for the church, or against a refined anti-Christian culture which would lead the church away from Christ (Tavaszy 1930:137).

According to Makkai, 'self-conscious Calvinism' has itself prepared the ground for dialectical theology. But since Calvinism in Transylvania is already a constructive theology, there is nothing new in what dialectical theology can say to the indigenous theologian. Dialectical theology, in fact addresses issues that are not found in the Transylvanian context. 'Here, there is no need to fight against subjective and romantic spirituality, there is no need to criticise experience-Christianity', here 'there is no production-line type home mission, and there is no refined cultural life as in Switzerland' (Tavaszy 1930:136 and quoted in Juhász I 1966:346). Dialectical theology might be needed in the German cultural situation, but since the Transylvanian context differs from that of Western Europe, here it is dispensable. It can be accepted as a correction, as a warning voice at best, but it needs to be rejected as a theological school or trend.

Makkai's position produced great zeal on the pro-dialectical theology side to show how the indigenous constructive theology was compatible with dialectical theology, pointing to the confessional and strong Calvinist features of Barth's theology. When Sándor Makkai said that dialectical theology did not bring anything new he

perhaps meant the dimension of biblical-reformation and not the historical aspect. From a historical point of view even in Transylvania the movement brought something new. To show what exactly, is the goal of this study.

Makkai, already in 1926 had reached a kind of 'theology of the Word' without the aid of Barth's theology and without being aware of dialectics applied by Barth. The shape of his theology is this:

He considered religion to be an experience, being a 'poignant spiritual meeting of the sinful man with the gracious God'. Makkai called this experience the 'soul of Calvinism'. He also thought that the merit of Calvinism is that it found the 'only true way' to describe the possibility of this encounter to the sinful man. In this encounter 'the soul is shaken even at its roots, when the Most High appears in his splendour the old man dies and a new one is born'. The Most High 'shines in Christ' so the encounter is the experience of God's grace and love (Makkai 1926:8f.).

The Bible, thinks Makkai, is the Word of God, but he made use of liberal concepts to describe the nature of the Bible. The Bible is the objective knowledge of a 'personal experience' which 'expresses in a tangible way... makes conscious and verifiable the experience of the believers, experience carried from *grace and through faith* both to the community of the believers and to its spiritual opponents' (Makkai 1926:12). Makkai also ascribes to Calvinism the principle according to which 'scripture is the revelation of God, and this revelation alone can give content to our existence and is the sole way of knowing God, man and world, and is the infallible and irreplaceable regulator of our life'. He thus maintains that 'the Word is not identical with the Bible, but is contained in the Bible' (Makkai 1926:16). The Word is God's eternally living and working *will*, by which God wants to *save* us; 'this saving-will appeared for us in Christ, as Word incarnate. The Word is whatever points to him in the Bible and, speaks about him, emerges from him and leads to him' (Makkai 1926:16). Makkai, as we can see,

differentiates between the Word and the words as external form of the Bible. Referring to Calvin's *Institutes* Makkai thinks that in order for the Bible to become the Word of God for us we need the working of 'a partly human and partly divine factor'. He did not reach the point of regarding obedience (the human factor) – as Barth did – to be God's work, but stated that God must address our faith for us to hear God's Word. 'Scripture' – he said – 'is Word only for faith'. Makkai is not afraid that 'the dedicated believer' might be lost in the letters of the Bible since 'for him everywhere the Spirit of the Bible is revealed. God himself responds to faith with the words of the Bible and testifies about what is the Word in the Bible' (Makkai 1926:17).

The position of Sándor Makkai on the Word of God can be seen as a modified Calvinism, which shows lots of similarities with dialectical theology but it is not identical with it. With the exception of the issue of obedience that I mentioned above, Barth would have agreed with most of what Makkai said. In the way Makkai formulated his position, the touch of liberal theology is still present, especially when he called the Bible 'objective knowledge of a personal experience' (Makkai 1926:12), which makes the experience 'verifiable' not only for the community of believers, but for the opponents of faith as well. Barth also includes the experience of revelation in the process of the constitution of the Scripture, but for him the Bible is witness to the reality of revelation that took place in Jesus Christ and is not linked with the personal experience of the believer (GD:201). Barth also would dispense with the idea of verifiability, especially by the 'opponents of faith', since he laid a strong emphasis on the need of faith in the hearing the Word of God. The encounter in which the hearing of the Word is possible is at the same time a transforming and renewing experience and not only a convincing act on a rational level (cf Hunsinger 1991:52).

At the same time Barth would agree with Makkai on the idea of the Word being an eternal, living and saving act of God. Makkai's idea that the Word is everything in

the Bible that points towards and speaks about Christ would delight Barth as much as Makkai's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit as making alive the letters of the Bible.

To sum up, the 'correction' model is judging dialectical theology from the point of view of the theological context. Since dialectical theology was born in a different cultural context – it was said – it cannot be useful in any other way than to examine it analytically and from its Swiss phenomenon to draw some conclusions to help the Transylvanian theological enterprise. Its effect is seen only in formal and methodological matters. It can be a 'prophetic voice', a call back to one's own theological enterprise, an encouragement to follow the way already chosen. This, however, was too little to expect from dialectical theology. Reducing its effect to a formal contact means missing the prophetic element any theological trend might have – and dialectical theology undoubtedly had a decisive impact on the twentieth century theology. To deny any major impact of dialectical theology in Transylvania runs into the danger of minimising the problems that the Hungarian Reformed Church faced in Transylvania. The conclusion of the 'correction' model (even unexpressed) might have been the following: 'we are on a good path, we know what to do, and how to do it, we need only a little help, and then everything will be all right'. But this affirmation just would not have been true.

C. Dialectical Theology – Connectedness to Earlier Theologies

Géza Nagy was not present at the theological consultation in Nagyenyed, but wrote an extended paper on dialectical theology. His study 'The Antecedents, Importance and Critique of Barth's Theology' (1930) is one of the most serious and in-depth analyses of

the topic at that time, alongside Tavaszy's writings. While Makkai attempted to link Barth's theology to the context of the achievements of Transylvanian Calvinist theology, Nagy explored the connectedness of its new elements to the positive features of nineteenth-century theology. He brought some very serious charges against Barth's dialectical approach as well. We shall look at his position in detail in section VII.B.1.

Nagy had a positive critical approach to the theology which had developed between Schleiermacher and Barth. He said that the nineteenth century, from a dogmatic point of view, besides all its humanistic endeavours, was *struggling* with Christianity, was in *search* of the Gospel, and even if it did not find the Gospel in its purest form, at least it brought up some parts of it, and, for better or worse, it formulated it scientifically (Nagy G 1930:588).

The most important aspect of Karl Barth's theology, says Nagy, is its sensitivity towards the 'objective'. By 'objective' he means the objective existence of God. While Tavaszy's concern was the transcendent versus immanent, Nagy turned his attention to the issue of the objective and subjective existence of God. Barth is highly sensitive towards the 'reality' of God and his heavenly realm but, argues Nagy, the theological realism represented by Barth was present also in the theological system before him. The objective feature makes its presence felt gradually with the great theologians of the nineteenth century. To discover this, one needs to consider two aspects of the theological enterprise. *First*, in contrast with living faith, theology is understood as a secondary phenomenon, as an intellectual attempt to expound God's Word. *Second*, one needs to consider the interaction of philosophy with the Gospel. Inevitably the Gospel gets mixed up with the prevailing world-view. In the knowledge of these facts one should be less intransigent about theological systems, especially when the endeavour for the objective can be discovered in them, said Nagy (1930:588).

Barth rejected Schleiermacher in spite of some congenial features of their theology, says Nagy, since Schleiermacher, according to Barth, did not make clear that man is in great misery, and that Christian religion is part of the cause of that misery. Nagy, however, excuses Schleiermacher by reason of the 'historical situation' in which he lived. His age was dominated by the authority of Kantian philosophy and Schleiermacher did his best to express Christian faith in the concepts of emerging romanticism. In this situation Schleiermacher brought something new to his generation.

In his *Speeches* – argues Nagy – Schleiermacher condemns the pride of his contemporaries, drawing their attention to the fact that they are truly humans only if instead of 'the insolence of titan Prometheus' they think about their limitations, finiteness and turn their attention to infinite world of religion, adopting the passivity of a child. Only this way the Universe, 'this life-abounding world' will reveal itself to them (Nagy G 1930:588). Nagy appreciates this call to humility. When we disregard the religious concept of 'the Universe' in Schleiermacher's writings – he says – we face the 'absolute world of religion and grace' in its gripping freshness (Nagy G 1930:588).

It is true, that the way in which Schleiermacher formulated the great truths of Christian doctrines in *The Christian Faith*, is rejected by the biblically-minded pious. Nagy, however, thinks that Schleiermacher can and must be defended. Schleiermacher considered that he was a prophet of the modern world, so he is faithful to the modern dogmas formulated by Kant: everything is true and real in the measure it becomes the content of our knowledge: Schleiermacher refused to *know* about God in Himself (Nagy G 1930:589). The Trinity and divine attributes became mere subjective reflections, and not the adequate expressions of God's essence. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher in 'a declining and penurious age, through revealing the absolute world of religion created that atmosphere in which not only a serious theological, but a reviving constructive work had been launched' (Nagy G 1930:589). Relating Christianity to the person and

work of Jesus Christ, he opened up the spring of renewal of church life. Unfortunately Schleiermacher did not make use of this spring, but his importance is in the fact that he brought back Christian theology and faith from being based on authority and made it 'personal' again – says Nagy.

Although Nagy is quite convincing about Schleiermacher's merit, it can be argued that he does not make his point clearly about the reality of God in Schleiermacher's theology. In my opinion this is due to the confusion about the idea itself. Géza Nagy mixes up the idea of the objective reality of God stated in a theological system with the religious experience of the individual who has a strong 'sense for the reality of God'. It seems that Nagy does not understand Barth entirely when he says: 'What Barth thinks to be the indispensable requirement from a real theology is the *taste toward the objective*, namely a sense of the reality of God and his heavenly reality' (Nagy G 1930:586). The 'sense' of this reality is a psychological element that is manifested in the religious experience and is true only in that context. Although in Schleiermacher's theology the 'sense of the reality' of God as the sense of the dependence on the Absolute is strong, this 'sense' is still a psychological concept. Furthermore, what Schleiermacher calls the 'sense of the reality of God' is not the same with what Barth means by 'objectivity of God'; namely that God stands over against humanity with a sovereign claim, and with the possibility of being known objectively.

The Ritschlian School – Nagy continues – has been born in a new philosophical context, namely that of philosophical materialism, positivism and Lotze's neo-Kantianism. The starting points of each are *immanent* physical or psychological facts. The slogan of Ritschl's age was *objectivity* and he attempted to line up with this view. Although anthropocentrism still dominated his theology, nevertheless in the 'objects' of religion he discovered those values that manifest their superiority and *reality* in the ceasing of humanity's crisis and filling humanity with new content. He discovers the

idea that 'God's world, the reality above us is greater, and more valuable than us. This was such a truth that in spite of its philosophical clumsiness and theological poverty kept Ritschlian theology alive, and made it the starting point of other systems' (Nagy G 1930:591).

The *history of religion* school was characterised, in spite of its common contempt, by a strong sense towards the objective, says Nagy. Troeltsch, a main exponent of this school, knew that religion and philosophy are two distinctive entities. Religion is a fearful shivering before that which surpasses all understanding. Metaphysics, after all, is forced to recognise a certain 'irrational reality', which exists and functions alongside the rational, without being demonstrated by logical laws. For Troeltsch religion was both the hypothesis for the idealist philosophy, and the active presence of the Absolute Spirit in the finite spirit. Religion always belongs to the sphere of 'absolute necessity', where we can rely on the real, and elsewhere not found, revelation of God. On this basis Troeltsch affirmed that 'Christianity, as a scientific theological formulation is relative, but the God, in whom it believes through Jesus Christ, and its final revelation is the only absolute, unsurpassable' (Nagy G 1930:593).

Nagy concludes that Barth built up his theological structure by means of already existing bricks, but this is not to say that Barth's theology is not original. Although he used previously existent ideas, the structure that came out of his hand is different from what was before him. Every age has its own vision about God and His works and explains it in its own framework of thought. Barth, with his prophetic consciousness, is divided by an entire world from the theologians who lived before him. Barth's theology has been born under an existential impulse of a preacher burdened with the task of delivering the message of God, but his own soul is being torn apart by doubts. One who does not consider this existential impulse, says Nagy, but looks to his theology only as being a criticism of former theological schools, misunderstands Barth completely.

Barth's theology, 'like Calvin's, Schleiermacher's and Ritschl's' was brought into existence by the 'command of life'. The entirely new worldview and the 'uncertainty of the church and some individuals emerging from the new worldview require from the church and from all of us, to give up our endeavours, and *stand-points* and to look for new ways to God'. Karl Barth's theology is a guide in this search, concludes Nagy (1930:597).

Nagy's mediating effort is honourable, but the argument on which he based it is neither coherent nor convincing. We saw above that he was confused about what the idea of 'objectivity' related to God in Barth means; he mixes up the subjective feeling that God really exists with an assertion of the real existence of God. The latter may not have an equivalent in conscious experience. While both Schleiermacher and Nagy thought that God really existed they were not concerned to differentiate between objective and subjective way of knowing God.

What was new in Barth as compared with previous theological trends is not so much the assertion of the objectivity (reality) of God, but the possibility of the objective knowledge of God and the way in which Barth understood this possibility. As we have seen in section III.D, according to Barth, God is not to be known as other objects in the world, through whatever human possibility, but from God's self-revelation. Apart from His self-revelation in Jesus Christ we cannot know him objectively, we cannot make our lordship over him by naming him in the process of knowing, but through revelation God gives himself to be known by us. Tavaszy was closer to the heart of the issue when he realised the importance of the change that came with Barth from an immanent to a transcendent concept of God.

D. Conclusion

The appearance of dialectical theology divided the more or less united theological scene in Transylvania in the 1920s and 30s and established three major initial responses to it. According to the models presented above the underlining issues were whether dialectical theology is continuous (or discontinuous) with former theological schools or relevant for the Transylvanian situation. We need to note that the models of reception were formed when theological thinking was still in 'fermentation' in Transylvania (Makkai 1990:117), but that Barth was already moving to the next stage of his theological development: a more dogmatic approach to Dogmatics. As the theological positions became more settled individual theologians moved closer towards a 'characteristic Transylvanian' position. Nevertheless, initially the models of 'discontinuity', 'continuity' and 'irrelevance' represent the positions taken.

As a general conclusion we can say that according to the basic issues involved in the models the reception of Barth's thought was characterised by three major elements.

1. *The relevance of the theological context.* It seems that Tavaszy paid less attention to this issue, since he does not speak about it in his major works in connection with dialectical theology. But the charge of total 'cultural insensitivity' can hardly be brought against him since in this period he wrote a good deal on the Transylvanian situation and Calvinism. Makkai's position was almost a total opposition to Tavaszy's because he strongly emphasised the contextual considerations. Nagy, although did not talk explicitly about Transylvania, thinks that in a 'new theological trend' nothing is entirely new, but it has elements from previous systems or trends. These issues help us to see that a fruitful effect of dialectical theology in Transylvania undoubtedly needs to consider the appropriation of its context.

2. *Dialectical theology can have a positive contribution.* This was the general idea, and the only difference consisted in the degree of the extent, and the area where dialectical theology might bring a contribution. The new reformation model gives the biggest role to it but even the 'correction' model recognises a certain contribution. This shows us that we are entitled to ask whether dialectical theology did in fact have an effect in the Transylvanian church life and theological scene, and what this was.

3. *Dialectical theology was received critically.* The strongest in criticism were Sándor Makkai and Géza Nagy, but we are not entitled to say that Tavaszy was entirely non-critical. Criticisms were put forward with regard to the main area of dialectical theology, especially in its claims to a new approach to the Word of God, religion and revelation.

As this study will show, the initial positions came closer to each other to such an extent that after about ten years from the appearance of dialectical theology in Transylvania they formed basically a united position. Makkai left Transylvania in 1936 and the representatives of theological liberalism also came to be silent. The change however was not the victory of one approach to dialectical theology over the others but a position formed by the conjunction of the above mentioned approaches.

CHAPTER V

BARTH AND CALVIN: EXAMINING A CLAIM

A. Claiming Barth for Calvinism

As we have seen in the previous chapter, a major response to Barth's thought in Transylvania was to claim that Barth's thought is a catalyst for a new reformation of the church. Sándor Tavaszy may be taken as representative of this kind of reception. His main concern (see 1931b) was to prove that dialectical theology picks up the agenda of the Reformation and puts it again in the centre of theological debate. He attempted to demonstrate that dialectical theology is Calvinism at its best because in articulating his Christian identity in the limits of the Reformed church he thought that only a Calvinist theology is capable of renewing the life of church. Tavaszy borrowed Makkai's expression that dialectical theology in a 'correction' of the actually dominant theological trend, but at the same time kept his idea of dialectical theology being a 'reformation theology'. In his view the corrections brought by dialectical theology are deeper than in Makkai's view. His argument is the following.

(i.) Dialectical theology, after the liberal trend, said Tavaszy, makes theology become *theology* again. Before the appearance of dialectical theology theological scholarship had been at a dead-lock: 'on the one hand internally it had been torn away from its mother-womb, the church, and on the other hand it was dissolved into history, more specifically into the history of the Spirit (or philosophy) and into psychology'

(Tavaszy 1931b:3). The merit of dialectical theology is that it brings theology, as the first Reformation did, into a close contact with the Word of God. Since the church is the theatre of the Holy Spirit, dialectical theology 'convinced theology that theological scholarship outside the church is fatuous' (Tavaszy 1931b:3).

(ii.) Further, Tavaszy stated that dialectical theology made the re-evaluation of theological trends an 'issue of conscience'. He said that the 'importance of dialectical theology is not to be measured in what it could achieve in the first decade of its existence... but with the *quality of life* it brought about in theological scholarship and thought' (Tavaszy 1931b:4). This is due to the fact that dialectical theology used the same principles that in 'the theology of the Reformers were already proven to be trustworthy'. Tavaszy said:

We must not forget that the biblical-prophetic critique used also by dialectical theology through the theology and preaching of the Reformers created a *reformation* in the church, *consequently it is suitable to give a new standpoint and measure for the re-evaluation of theological trends* (Tavaszy 1931b:4).

Tavaszy thinks that dialectical theology is humble enough to consider itself only a *corrective* factor in theology, not a self-contained theological school. Although dialectical theology does not itself desire to compete with other trends, nevertheless, the academic theological world cannot be prevented from seeing it as an independent theological trend. It is clearly that by 'correction' of theological trends Tavaszy in fact, meant a drastic change in theological principle, which can be equated with a new reformation.

(iii.) Tavaszy is not content to only speak about reformation. All theological trends from Schleiermacher onward had 'reformation' on their agenda. The corrective work of dialectical theology begins with correcting the concept of reformation itself. According to Tavaszy, Barth brought a radical change in the interpretation of the Reformation: the application of the *theological-historical* standpoint. This standpoint –

along with the events determined by immanent factors – recognises the validity of transcendental occurrences, as the consequences and expressions of divine will. Quoting Thurneysen and Brunner, Tavaszy thinks that the source of the Reformation was in the fact that Luther experienced the reality of sin so profoundly that the church with all its institution was not able to give ease to the human soul (Tavaszy 1931b:7). In the Reformation, said Tavaszy, God the Holy Spirit through the immense sense of sin evoked in souls a deep hunger after the reality of God. This is the essence of the Reformation. So according to the ‘correction’ of dialectical theology

neither Enlightenment, Pietism and Rationalism nor Romanticism and Idealism can be regarded as the continuation of the Reformation. They cannot be regarded as the development of its true essence, but they must be regarded as the consequences of the Renaissance’s humanism, altered by Protestantism in some places (Tavaszy 1931b:9).

(iv.) Dialectical theology not only re-establishes the original meaning of Reformation, said Tavaszy, but also makes its ‘correction’ on the basis of the theology of the Reformers. It does this by clarifying the difference between the theology of the Reformers and that of Protestant orthodoxy. The difference between the two lies in the understanding of the concept of revelation. The Reformers – continues Tavaszy – stood before the Bible and realised that God addresses them personally, they realised their deep need and their own inability to help themselves. The way out of the crisis was conceived as coming from outside, something new happened to them. This new thing was understood as God’s creative act on them. Protestant orthodoxy was not able to discern that hearing God’s Word is an event brought by God himself. For this reason Protestant orthodoxy made a fatal mistake when it maintained that Scripture in itself is revelation (Tavaszy 1931b:10).

Tavaszy however did not realise, as I show below in section C, that Calvin himself was inclined to equate revelation with the Bible, thus preparing the way for the dogmatism of protestant orthodoxy.

From the above we can see that the importance of dialectical theology for Sándor Tavaszy lies in the fact that dialectical theology releases the fresh waters of the Reformation and with the force of released power of its theology a new reformation can be brought about for the renewal of the church. For Tavaszy, reformation theology (especially Calvinism) and dialectical theology meant basically the same thing.

Based on this historical survey Tavaszy argued that dialectical theology is in tune with Calvinism in at least four areas.

(1.) Reformed theology has always been *Scripture-theology* (Tavaszy 1929a:48). Tavaszy shows that from Calvin onward Reformed theology has been interested in the Word of God as contained in the Scripture and not on subjective experience of the individual. In Barth we also see the importance of the Word of God vis-à-vis religious experience stressed by the liberal theological view. Both in Calvin and Barth the Christian life is founded on the Word of God.

(2.) The reformed character of dialectical theology can be seen in the way how it develops the *doctrine of Christ* (Tavaszy 1929a:51). Barth had the courage to return to a traditional, Chalcedonian understanding of Christ's nature and thought through the enhypostatic union of the two natures. Dialectical theology is standing on the strong foundation of the theological tradition emerging from Calvin. Dialectical theology was also capable of overcoming the so widely spread historicism in Christology.

(3.) Dialectical theology has overcome the false understanding in the *doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, which 'according to humanistic-psychological thinking, is a kind of human power' (Tavaszy 1929a:53). Dialectical theology was able to fight against this humanistic understanding, and doing so, demonstrated its allegiance to a 'pure Calvinistic' position said Tavaszy.

(4.) Dialectical theology, especially in the form presented by Karl Barth 'due to the powerful *proclamation of sovereignty of God* is a predestination-theology' – said

Tavaszy. This theology stands alone in recognising the ‘great replacement’ done by liberalism between religion and revelation. Religion as a human possibility came to rule over revelation, cutting itself from its own source of life, which is in fact revelation (Tavaszy 1929a:53).

Tavaszy stressed the importance of Calvin for the theology of Barth. He was convinced about a strong and organic relationship between the theologies of the two. The conviction not only made Tavaszy open to dialectical theology, but turned him into a fervent promoter of it, fulfilling by this a pioneer work in the Hungarian Reformed Church. His conclusion is this:

In [this] harsh criticism dialectical theology reaches up to the heights of the spirit of the theology of the reformers, especially that of Calvin, because this critical standpoint involves a recognition which is able to stand against false and untrue positions. *This critical standpoint is identical with the Reformed faith that is true theology* (Tavaszy 1929a:54 italics added).

For Tavaszy and his colleagues (László 1938:18-19; Kiss B 1936:246-247; Gönczy 1931:13; Geréb 1966:316-317), to refer to dialectical theology as a new form of Calvinism was very important. By this discourse they wanted to make acceptable a theological trend that at first sight was alien to the historical heritage of Transylvania. At the same time it had been desirable to see dialectical theology in harmony with the pursuit of Confessional Calvinism. The goal of this chapter is to enquire into the assertion Tavaszy and his colleagues made that dialectical theology would be ‘Calvinism at its best’. The result of our enquiry will show that although dialectical theology has some Calvinist elements in it, at the same time Barth differed significantly from Calvin. The investigation will touch on the doctrine of the knowledge of God, that of the scripture, election and Christ, since these were the major issues emerging from the reception of Barth and the relationship of his theology with Calvin’s. Examining the

topics should illuminate the degree to which Transylvanian theologians actually accepted Barth's own approach to dialectical theology.

B. The Knowledge of God

Calvin's doctrine of the Scripture is closely related to the epistemological question. In the opening sentences of his *Institutes*, Calvin presents the wisdom which consists in two parts: the knowledge of God and that of ourselves. These two are so strongly interrelated, says Calvin that which one comes first 'is not easy to discern'. There is a kind of circle here in which the knowledge of ourselves is 'shed like dew from heaven upon us' but at the same time 'we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God' (Inst I.i.1). For Calvin the knowledge of God is more important, as this knowledge makes our sight clear in perceiving our real self; nevertheless a perception of the self and that of the world still exists. Calvin's reference to a certain type of natural theology makes this fact obvious for us.

Real knowledge of ourselves is not possible apart from the knowledge of God (Inst I.i.2). We might see ourselves righteous, upright and wise, but the Lord is the sole standard by which the judgement needs to be made. Looking in the face of God we can really contemplate and scrutinise ourselves. Barth used a similar image in expressing the qualitative difference between man and God (ER II:110). In the event of revelation, which is the hearing of the Word of God, knowledge of God and that of ourselves are established. Revelation shows us who God is, because it is not a revelation about God, but a revelation of God. At the same time revelation shows what man is, due to the fact that revelation is needed; we see that he is a sinner, but at the same time one that is saved. The qualitative difference between God and man that Barth talked about, in Calvin reaches us through the idea of majesty of God. The God whose knowledge

makes possible the true knowledge of ourselves is the God in whose presence we ‘are so shaken and struck dumb as to be laid low by the dread of death’, man looking in the glory of this God is ‘overwhelmed by it and almost annihilated’ (Inst I.i.3). This is very much in tune with what we can find in early Barth expressed in the dialectic of God and man.

According to Calvin, without piety, which in Calvin means reverence and love of God, God cannot be known.

Now the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God, but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what it is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking; God is known where there is no religion, or piety (Inst I.ii.3).

Here by piety Calvin does not mean the precondition of knowing God in the sense of the knowledge of God as Redeemer in Christ. This sort of knowledge is lost because of the fall, but he speaks about a simple and primary knowledge the content of which is related to the feeling that ‘God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings’ (Inst I.ii.3). But this sort of exposition does not only lead us to a natural theology, but makes us wonder whether the introduction of the notion of primary knowledge is of any help. If true knowledge of God is the result of knowing God through Christ and emerging from an attitude of reverence, in what sense can it still be said that piety is a requirement for knowing God?

Barth seems to be clearer on this issue. The knowability of God rests entirely on God, on his readiness to be known by man; readiness which is grounded in his very being and activity and not arising from the existence of the creature (CD II.1:65). Nevertheless, having two characteristics, that of truth and grace, this readiness means openness (truth), nay openness to us (grace). The grace character of the knowability of God excludes the legitimacy of natural theology. The readiness of man to know God is

not a quality of man that is amplified by God in the event of communicating of God's Word to him. Barth founds the readiness of both God and humanity on Christ. Jesus Christ in his role of mediator makes it possible for us to know God. He is the knowability of God on our side, as he is the grace of God itself, and therefore also the knowability of God on God's side (CD II.1:150). Barth links faith to the act of revelation itself and knowledge of God. Faith neither brings forth knowledge, nor follows knowledge, but comes with the knowledge of God in the event of the hearing of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. This understanding of faith differs from that of Calvin, whose account is more static than Barth's, and even makes an unfortunate split in faith when declares that there is saving and non-saving faith. We will discuss this issue later, in relation with Calvin's doctrine of predestination and election.

The ambiguity of Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God continues in his exposition of natural theology. To be sure from the start, Calvin does not speak about the knowledge of God from the nature or from the constitution of man, but speaks about the knowledge of God being 'naturally implanted in the minds of man' (Inst I.iii). Calvin maintains that 'there is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy'. The material aspect of this awareness is the knowledge of God's majesty, as a consequence of which people are not drawn closer to God, but are stripped of any pretence of ignorance.

Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honour him and to consecrate their lives to his will (Inst I.iii.1).

Therefore man is condemned because he either smothered or corrupted the knowledge of God: superstition, man's continuous turning away from God, his idolatry

and hypocrisy are vivid arguments to support this thesis. From this basis of innate sense of the divine Calvin develops his view of natural theology in *Institutes* I.v. as follows.

God is revealed in the created order in innumerable evidences in heaven and earth. These evidences however are seen not only by the wise scientists but even by ‘the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them ... It is, accordingly, clear that there is no one to whom the Lord does not abundantly show his wisdom’ (Inst I.v.2). Besides the created universe man, as a micro-cosmos, is the loftiest proof of divine wisdom. In his physical and spiritual constitution (for each one undoubtedly feels within the heavenly grace that quickens him) man displays God’s power, goodness and wisdom so there is no need to go outside ourselves to comprehend God (Psalm 8:4).

Man in this situation turns away from God with an unimaginable stupidity and confuses the creature with the Creator. This is why the evidences of God in creation do not profit us; they cannot lead us into the right path. Although the revelation was not intended for the condemnation of man, in rejecting it the manifestations of God become a testimony against him (Inst I.v.14). Man is incapable of mounting up unto the knowledge of God. He rests in his ignorance and fallenness, out of which there is only one way, which is, we might say, God’s second attempt with man to bestow the actual knowledge of him in the Scripture. This is Calvin’s natural theology in a nutshell.

Barth’s approach is quite different. Especially in his early writings, he puts forward a very forceful dialectic. For him the Gospel proclaims that God is utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are incapable of knowing Him. Barth is not interested in any knowledge of God apart from salvation, the divine act of which, as revelation, is an ‘other-worldly’ act which is entirely vertical. Before and apart from God’s revelation-salvation act we know nothing of Him.

We know that God is He whom we do not know, and our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of our knowledge. We know that God is the Personality, which we are not, and that this lack of Personality is precisely what dissolves and establishes our personality (ER II:45).

If we could speak in Barth about a knowledge preceding special revelation, such knowledge would be without any content. Natural theology is not acceptable, since God would no longer be the 'Unknown'. 'If God is to us, no longer what we are not' – says Barth – 'what has become of the thanks we are due to Him? The revolt of Prometheus is wholly justified when once Zeus – the "No-God" – has been exalted to the throne of God' (ER II:47).

Barth's theology also differs from old orthodoxy, and even from that of Calvin, in the use of dialectics. In these theologies there is only a naive dialectic which based the inconceivability of God on human capacities and limitations alone. Doing so they do nothing more than open the door for the Feuerbachian critique of theology as being a veiled anthropology (Migliore 1991: xxxvi ff.). In 1940 in CD II.1, after six years the famous *No!* was written against Emil Brunner, Barth developed an elaborate argument against natural theology.

Natural theology seems attractive to some because of its practicability and self-demonstration and for some because of its supposed pedagogic and apologetic usefulness as a prelude for the knowledge of God, admits Barth. Again some prefer it because of its alleged scriptural support and others find some sort of readiness in man towards God. But, Barth thinks, if measured by the canon of the Scripture natural theology crumbles. Adopting a position and the premise of unbelief – the case of apologetics – it is not possible to advance towards the premise of faith, 'or even give the unbeliever the assurance of a candid or authentic discussion. No indispensability can be claimed for natural theology on the ground of usefulness' (Bromiley 1979:62). Man is ready for God only in the context of God's readiness for man, which is grace. Natural

theology is the advocate of a possibility and openness of man to God other than that of grace, is the ‘affirmation that even apart from God’s grace, already preceding God’s grace, already anticipating it, he is ready for God, so that God is knowable to him otherwise than from and through Himself’ (CD II.1:135).

Comparing Barth and Calvin on the knowability of God and the possibility of natural theology we can see that Barth strongly emphasised the dialectic between man and God, between natural theology (or even religion) and the act of revelation in Jesus Christ. For Barth the impossibility of natural knowledge of God and so natural theology is a premise which is at the basis of a theology based on the revelation of the Word of God (CD II.1:168). Something called ‘natural theology’ could be only a post-revelation cognisance of God’s footsteps in creation. For Calvin natural theology is a practical impossibility because of man’s blindness, or short-sightedness (Brunner and Barth 2002[1934]:106. It anticipates special revelation; it is there, although it cannot be taken advantage of (Inst I.v.14). In a way natural revelation is in the fabric of man’s constitution, which however is not seen because of the darkness that covers our eyes. But when the light of the Scripture through the Holy Spirit comes, then which is down below us takes life again.

C. The Doctrine of Scripture

In the *Institutes* the doctrine of the Bible follows Calvin’s discussion on the kind of knowledge of God; which ‘shines forth in the fashioning of the universe and the continuing government of it’ (Inst I.v). Here the doctrine of the Bible stands in the place of an elaborate doctrine of revelation. In Calvin the doctrine of the Bible is a larger concept than the doctrine of revelation and the latter is included in the former. In Barth it is the other way round. In Calvin ‘the scripture is needed to guide and teach’ (Inst

I.vi) anyone who wants to know God. In Barth the knowledge of God is actualised by the revelation of the Word of God, to which the Bible is a witness.

Calvin says that God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the scripture. This 'better help' directs us aright to the Creator and it helps us exactly where revelation of God in the universe failed. 'It was not in vain, then that he *added the light of his word* by which to become known unto salvation; and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself' (Inst I.vi.1 italics added). This passage contains two ideas that are important in Calvin's doctrine of the Scripture. *First* God added the light of his word – this is the complementary character of biblical revelation. The *second* is that of this heavenly light only the elect have part.

The way Calvin develops his topic made an impression on orthodoxy and became its form of presenting the doctrine. Practically Calvin equates the Word of God and Scripture, when he begins historically with the patriarchs and the prophets in whose hearts and minds God put his Word – which, in fact are certain doctrines, says Calvin – giving them the responsibility of handing it over to their posterity. Less emphasis is put on the event character of revelation and more on inspiration, in the sense that Calvin has an inspired book in mind rather the revealing encounter between God and man. Revelation results in a doctrine that protects us from erring, as a teaching and instruction.

[I]n order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginnings from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture (Inst I.vi.2).

It is true that for Calvin, Scripture draws its authority from the witness of the Holy Spirit; since God is believed to be its author, God speaks through it. This Protestant principle was seldom questioned by Protestant theology during the centuries, although

to what exactly the Holy Spirit is testifying has been variously interpreted. Calvin thinks that the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truth of the doctrines written down in the Bible. For the unbeliever the Christian doctrines may be an opinion among many others, and they demand proofs to enforce the credibility of divine speech. But the testimony of the Holy Spirit is more excellent than any proof, than all reason.

For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his word so also the word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commended (Inst I.vii.4).

We witness here a similar inconsistency in Calvin's argument to that about natural theology. After saying all the above, he goes on to discuss the validation of the Scripture using heteronomous arguments: 'So far as the human reason goes, sufficiently firm proofs are at hand to *establish* the credibility of Scripture' (Inst I.viii). – says Calvin. Appealing to human reason he speaks about arguments such as 'Scripture is superior to all human wisdom', 'the greatest antiquity of the Scripture', 'prophecies that are fulfilled contrary to all human expectations', and so on. What is the usefulness of such argument after he has affirmed the following?

Therefore, illuminated by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgement that Scripture is from God; but above human judgement we affirm with utter certainty ... that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgement may lean; but we subject our judgement and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork (Inst I.vii.5).

The use of arguments is nevertheless 'to banish all doubt'. But whose doubt? Those who accept what was set before them being the Word of God, dare not to 'impugn the credibility of Him who speaks'. But are those who do not believe convinced by rational arguments? Calvin has himself said, no!

To what is this inconsistency due? Barth says that in Calvin we see that he tries to overcome the difference between man's orientation to God and his orientation to the world. This is why he links knowledge of God and man's own self so closely. The content of both kinds of knowledge are the same, for Calvin did not succeed in carrying through his programme, says Barth. He was not able to say that only a single knowledge exists, that of God, so he did no better than other theologians before him (Barth 1995[1922]:81).

The reason for Calvin's failing was his inability to realise that he was influenced by the Renaissance ethic. Barth argues against the direct identification of revelation and the Bible from the position that regards revelation as an event. If revelation is an event – and it is, since it is God's self revelation – it can be an event which depends only on God's freedom. For this reason, we cannot presuppose it or anticipate it. In revelation we are concerned with God's own Word spoken by God Himself. Yet in the Bible we are faced with human attempts to repeat and reproduce God's Word in human thought-forms and human words in the specific situations of the authors of individual books. The dialectic of man's speech and God's speech is always present, we cannot avoid it. But the tension can and is solved in the event of the Word of God. Calvin was not right, said Barth, when he 'approximated revelation and Scripture much more closely than Augustine did' (CD I.1:114). The Bible cannot be equated with revelation because of the mystery character of the latter. Revelation is not only an act, but it is a mysterious act, so it is not comparable to any other self-presentation. It approaches us in a human garment without corresponding to it, nay contradicting it. Human words do not unveil, but veil revelation; this is called by Barth the secularity of God's Word. Barth applies here the dialectic between the world and God when he says that

In the speaking and receiving of God's Word what is involved is not just an act of God generally, and not just an act of God in creaturely reality as such, but an act of

God in the reality which contradicts God, which conceals Him, and in which His revelation is not just His act but His miraculous act, the tearing of an untearably thick veil, i.e., His mystery (CD I.1:168).

The Holy Spirit in the event of revelation transforms the secularity of God's Word. This is why we need to avoid framing even Church proclamation in such a way that it might seem to be a necessary element in the culture. Making allusion to Calvin (Inst I.viii) Barth writes: 'We are not to show that the Bible is a credible and a commendable book from various human standpoints as was usually done in the age of orthodoxy and the Enlightenment'. To prove the superiority of revelation is a futile human attempt.

Both Calvin and Barth argue from the basis of the Protestant scripture principle against the Roman Catholic view of authority (Inst I.vii.1). It is not the Church which establishes the Bible but the Church that is established by the Scripture. For Barth the greatest problem of the Roman Catholic doctrine is the issue of 'directness'. The Catholic Church claims direct access to the revelation for itself and from this access it draws the authority to interpret the Bible. But, says Barth, 'revelation meets us only indirectly, only in scripture – and this means biblical text, in words and sentences. The prophets the apostles and their witness exist for us only in this way' (Barth 1995[1922]:215). In this indirectness, and in this way only, can Barth equate the reality of revelation with the reality of the Bible? Yes, but only indirectly for the Scripture is not revelation and revelation is not Scripture.

Barth takes more seriously the historicity of the Bible than Calvin, when he points to the Bible as a human affair. The authors of the Bible used the same methods which they used in dealing with other subjects. Denying it, even in part, would be equal with cutting the ground from under our feet. The historicity of the Bible needs not to be counted as its disadvantage or failure in communicating God's Word.

For the sake of the concealment of revelation, its communication must always be a human affair. For this reason, precisely on a theological view, the seventeenth century doctrine of verbal inspiration, the idea that the biblical authors did not think and write on their own, but simply took down heavenly dictation is so deplorable. This view changes revelation into direct revelation ... It does not just put scripture in the pope's place, but makes it a pope, a paper pope, from which we are to get oracles as we get shoes from a shoemaker (Barth 1995[1922]:216f.).

The verbal inspiration theory, says Barth is the sign that believers cannot bear the paradox of the Word of God any more, and do not understand what is meant by the statement 'Scripture is the Word of God' (GD:58f.). But did Calvin teach verbal inspiration? Actually, in Calvin we not see a fully developed doctrine of verbal inspiration, but there are some important elements in his teaching which are at the basis of this theory. Calvin prepared the way for an understanding of verbal inspiration by equating revelation with the Bible and by the conception of revelation as dogma. This is more than to say revelation is of a propositional character. When someone says 'dogma' with relation to revelation, he has put the emphasis on one aspect of truth, and in this case the words or the text through which the dogmas come to us are very important and need to be accurate. When Calvin said that God has imprinted in the hearts of the prophets and apostles the right doctrines about God and man (Inst I.vii.4), he has beyond any doubt prepared the way for a verbal inspiration theory to appear.

Comparing Calvin and Barth on the issue of Scripture we realise that in Calvin there is no sign of dialectical thinking, which to Barth permitted a more holistic approach to revelation and the doctrine of the Bible. Articulating the Word of God in its threefold forms Barth was able to confer on it a more existential character. This treatment of the subject gives more justice to the biblical testimony than a conception of revelation as biblical doctrines. Calvin by equating revelation with the Bible itself put himself in a position which is on the opposite side of the barricade vis-à-vis Barth. The struggle for a right understanding of Scripture and revelation became so needed, urgent

and dramatic because of the damage brought to theology by liberalism, which in fact was a justified reaction to rational orthodoxy that finds its roots in Calvin's understanding of the Bible.

We shall see at section VI.B.2.c that Sándor Tavaszy is closer to Barth in his doctrine of Scripture than to Calvin. He however did not go into a detailed analysis of either Calvin or Barth on Scripture as I have done above, and he did not pay attention to any possible differences or contradictions. As my earlier quotation of him shows (Tavaszy 1931b:10), he overlooked the fact that not only orthodox dogmatism, but even Calvin equated revelation with the Bible.

E. The Doctrine of Election

In his argument in favour of dialectical theology Tavaszy argued that dialectical theology re-establishes the right Christ-centeredness in theology. We can see exactly this happening with the traditional understanding of the doctrine of election. Calvin had based his doctrine of double predestination on logical deduction from a doctrine of God. Barth, however, on the occasion of his visit in Transylvania in 1936, delivered a lecture on the doctrine of election which was a challenge to theologians to follow his theological development towards the centrality of Christ; he urged a purifying of the doctrine from alien influences, by applying a through Christo-centric treatment to it. To see the point of this we need to follow through Calvin's sequence of thought.

Calvin's doctrine of the Bible impels us to consider the doctrine of election. The linking issue between the doctrine of the Bible and that of election is faith. How does one recognise the authority of the Scripture? Calvin answers: by exercising true faith (Inst I.vi.1). This faith is given to all the elect of God, as the work of the Holy Spirit is effective only in those whom God has predestined to eternal life. In Calvin, ultimately,

the knowledge of God depends on God Himself. For those who are elected have a part in the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, which is indispensable to the actualisation of divine revelation. But there are some who are damned by God, so they are deprived of the possibility of knowing God, of having faith and experiencing the life-transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It is true that in Barth's theology the authority of the Scripture also actualises in faith, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. The difference between Calvin and Barth, however, consists in the conception about the object of God's election. In articulating their position these two great theologians once again part company, and in a more radical manner than concerning the Bible and revelation. Following the exposition of both Calvin and Barth we come to the conclusion that the basic issue at risk is the Doctrine of God which controls the view of election in both.

1. Predestination and the Sovereignty of God According to Calvin

Calvin connected his doctrine of election to his view of man, namely in the question of freedom. Man's total depravity leaves him without any freedom of choice in total slavery and inability (Inst II.ii.6). Calvin rejects the doctrine of free will, considering it a danger for divine sovereignty of God and he thinks the freedom of the creature robs God of his honour. Calvin makes man nothing to make God everything, makes man slave in order to make God the Lord.

Only true humility – recognition of our sinfulness and nothingness – gives glory to God. Man must accept that his understanding is limited and lacks spiritual insight and is dependent on God to know Him. Man's knowledge of God is God's own work and without the work of the Holy Spirit he is in darkness (Inst II.iii.6). These are the major issues that emerge from the examination of man's freedom by Calvin. Freedom of the will implies alternative possibilities, and this is what man does not have both from the point of view of his spiritual condition and that of God's predestination. Man, because

of his total depravity, takes decisions not because he uses his reason in deliberation or bending of his mind to it, but rather ‘like an animal he follows the inclination of his nature, without reason’. For this reason Calvin concludes: ‘whether or not man is impelled to seek after good by an impulse of nature has no bearing upon freedom of the will’ (Inst II.ii.26).

But what if man is not impelled by nature, but by grace? That rests entirely on God’s predestination and man will choose according to it; for God by his eternal election has predestined some to salvation, others to destruction. Calvin reads the doctrine of predestination out of the Bible (Inst III.xxii), warns against silence about it, and dismisses the danger of it for godly minds. He makes a distinction between foreknowledge and predestination. By foreknowledge he understands that all things always were and perpetually remain under God’s eyes, so for his knowledge there is neither past, nor future, but all things are present. Predestination is

God’s eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal constitution; rather eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death (Inst III.xxi.5).

But how do we know who is elected? All those are elected, says Calvin, ‘to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt’ (Inst III.xxi.7). for the believer. The medium in which election is recognised is faith, which is, at least in this matter, a subjective notion. In faith the individual has the assurance of his election. This election and the faith related to it need to be followed by justification and a righteous life, but Calvin blurs the issue by introducing the concept of *general election* and *un-saving* faith (Inst III.xxi.7). These concepts may cause uncertainty in believers about their individual election and predestination – a matter that Barth criticises very strongly (Barth 1937[1936]:31f.).

General election is spoken of in the context of election of Abraham's race. This however is continued with a special election, since not all the descendants of Abraham inherit God's blessing. Calvin uses the notion of general grace to protect in a way God's freedom in election, to avoid making God the slave of his own decisions.

It is easy to explain why the general election of a people is not always firm and effectual; to those with whom God makes the covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to preserve in the covenant to the very end. Rather, the outward change, without the working of inner grace, which might have availed to keep them, is intermediate between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meagre number of the godly (Inst III.xxi.7).

The outward change, as a result of a general election does not guarantee the assurance of being elected, nor does the presence of faith. 'Faith is the work of election, but election does not depend on faith' – says Calvin (Inst III.xxiv.3). He is right when he says that 'it is false to say that election takes effect only after we have embraced the gospel and takes its validity from this' (Inst III.xxiv.4). The election of God may not be made dependent on man's act neither is assured psychically in a subjective feeling. It needs to be placed on a more solid foundation. Calvin, however, does not secure this assurance when he says that 'if we try to penetrate to God's eternal ordination, that deep abyss will swallow us up' (Inst III.xxiv.3). Calvin tries to direct us to Christ saying that 'election is to be understood and recognised in Christ alone' (Inst III.xxiv.5). If we seek God's fatherly heart we should turn our attention towards Christ, the 'mirror of our election'. In him we recognise that we are adopted in God's family, and our relationship with Christ becomes the sign of our election. Calvin lays here a phenomenological basis for the believer's assurance. This basis, however, is not solid enough to resist the attacks of the doubts emerging from a life experience in the realm and limitation of history and the fallen situation. Above all it is not a proper Christological basis for predestination and election.

2. The Doctrine of God's Election of Grace in Barth

Barth is aware of the difficulties of founding the doctrine of election on the doctrine of God's sovereignty and attempted a more thoroughgoing Christological approach. The mature presentation of Barth's doctrine of election can be found in CD II/2. I, however, want to scrutinise his doctrine on the basis of his lecture given in Kolozsvár on the occasion of his visit to Transylvanian in 1936 (Barth 1937b[1936]). If the treatment of the doctrine in the *Church Dogmatics* II/2, which appeared in 1942 somehow might have escaped the attention of Transylvanian theologians in the agitated historical events of the early 40s, Barth's position presented in the lecture certainly became much known.

a. The Definition of the Doctrine

In the classical form of the doctrine presented by Calvin, predestination is God's pre-determination of man's salvation or damnation. His greatness and sovereignty was expressed by the fact that he determined the eternal fate of some to salvation, and of some to damnation. Nothing would prevent God in fulfilling this predetermination, it was thought, since otherwise his sovereignty would be hurt.

In his lecture Barth tried to convince his audience that the doctrine of predestination has not a primary, but a secondary role in theology, namely to explain the doctrine of grace: the acceptance of the grace of God is possible only through God's grace (Barth 1937b[1936]:4).

Barth affirms that God offers his grace continuously to man, but man is not in a position to accept it by his own power. If there is a decision made by man to accept God's grace that is possible only by the election of the grace of God. This is shown, according to Barth, in the doctrine of God's gracious election in a way that 'it does not tell anything new, but underlines and emphasises again what the Word has already told us about grace' (Barth 1937b[1936]:10). The sovereignty of grace is manifested in the

fact that 'whenever we decide for accepting grace, the decision about us has already been made' (Barth 1937b[1936]:11). Barth, like Calvin, expresses God's greatness through the doctrine of predestination, but Barth expresses greatness in terms of his grace and not with an idea of capricious enforcement of God's omnipotence or omniscience.

Barth's new approach to the doctrine consists in what he does not say compared to Calvin. For Barth the concept of election says *only* that we are the 'children of God from eternity' (Barth 1937b[1936]:12). Barth considers human decision in connection with grace, but gives the defining role in the human act to the divine decision. He clearly sees that the doctrine of predestination is not about human freedom or about the lack of it, but about the sovereignty of God's grace.

b. The Christological Foundation of Predestination

Barth, before christologically founding the doctrine of predestination, frees the doctrine from two harmful ideas that had 'infiltrated' into its classical form. He affirms that the doctrine of election by grace is not the result of human thinking, and it is not the object of our experience.

(i.) According to Barth the prefix 'pre' does not refer to any temporal or logical concept, but 'relegates us to God', who in his character as our creator has priority. The election of grace ontologically cannot be identified with the highest world-principle, and epistemologically cannot be scrutinised in the context of cause and effect. 'The doctrine of predestination' – says Barth – 'cannot be hailed as religious determinism, or a kind of determinism that brings about its deductions by means of religious experience' (Barth 1937b[1936]:15).

(ii.) Calvin in his *Institutes* refers to human experience as being the source of the doctrine of predestination (Inst III.xxiv.12 and 15) – observes Barth. By this he made it

possible for this doctrine to feed on ‘other sources than scripture’. Barth, however, rejects the use of any ‘well founded arguments from experience’ in theology. ‘If [the doctrine of] predestination is to remain a biblically and ecclesiastically founded true doctrine, then it cannot fall prey to such a passion heated by human experience’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:15).

For the Transylvanian theologians some of Barth’s clarifying thoughts might have not been new, but nevertheless their Christological foundation had the effect of a novelty. Barth argues that since the election of grace is a revealed truth, it should be biblically expressed, avoiding philosophical reasoning, and its meaning needs to be looked for in Christ, about whom the scripture talks. The knowledge of the doctrine of predestination, says Barth is linked with the knowledge of Jesus Christ, since ‘God has chosen in *him* those whom he chose ... until now we did not consider seriously enough, the principle that both election and rejection can only be known in Jesus Christ’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:16). This is why they can neither be identified with a thought image (concept) arrived at in a logical way nor be expressed through images of any experience. Barth thinks that Augustine, Luther, the Formula Concordiae and not even Calvin were able to explain truly what it means to be elected in Christ.

c. The Elected Ones in Christ

To be elected in Christ means, according to Barth that we were not elected alone, apart from Christ (Barth 1937b[1936]:16). Barth praises Calvin for realizing this and underlines that grace, our calling and our justification, are not our work but Christ’s work for us and upon us. The decision for our life happened in Christ and we accept it in him. This is why, argues Barth, our election can be understood only in the incarnation of Christ. This idea is present in Augustine and Calvin, but they did not develop it far enough. On the basis of the decision of the eternal Son and Word Jesus was conceived

by the Holy Spirit, born from the Virgin Mary and became the Son of God. This election, however, is our election too. In the moment of this work of the Holy Spirit, says Barth 'in the birth of Jesus Christ, we, who believe, by the grace of God, were also born to be his children, and in this way, without any human contribution, we were pre-formed and pre-ordained to believe and, through faith, we were made capable of accepting grace' (Barth 1937b[1936]:18).

Our election is in connection with Christ's resurrection too, says Barth. What happened at the cross was 'the temporal manifestation of our eternal election' – argues Barth. He criticised the Reformers in that they regarded Christ's justifying work as being only the means of our election and not its basis, and our election as being the divine decision preceding the reality of the cross and resurrection (Barth 1937b[1936]:19). Due to this standpoint the door was open for infiltration into the doctrine of predestination of such features as the use of human thinking in defining the doctrine, and the defining of predestination as the object of human experience.

Barth also teaches double predestination, but radically redefines it vis-à-vis the classical form of the doctrine. In the scripture double predestination – says Barth – 'is not a logical postulate ... it is not present there because *yes* without *no*, day without night, and consequently election without reprobation is not possible'. Calvin himself fell into the trap of the need of such a logical postulates when he said: 'election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation' (Barth 1937b[1936]:21, Cf Inst III.xxiii.1). Barth wanted to avoid the danger of an *unrelated doctrine of predestination* (önállósított predesztináció tan), that which is not satisfied with explaining divine grace only in itself. He rather wants to put Jesus Christ in the centre of his formulation of the doctrine of predestination. God accomplished double predestination through Jesus Christ: who is both the elected one and the reprobate one. Jesus Christ, as the elected one of the Father, was always obedient to his will, and finds that God has the right to

‘step into the place of the sinner in his Son, bearing man’s rightful punishment’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:25). God has the right to consider in the reprobation of Jesus Christ the reprobation of all men, but in such a way that he suspends man’s reprobation. We cannot dispute God’s right to act in this way:

He took away the curse of our reprobation and afflicted his Son instead, so in this way, for the merit of his death, ended our reprobation and accepted us by grace as his own children, due to the blameless suffering and mediation for us of his Son (Barth 1937b[1936]:25).

d. The Predestining God

Calvin conceived ‘God’s election of grace as an eternal decree, which irrevocably and unalterably divides humanity in two immutable groups’. According to Barth this division in two groups is ‘a human opinion clothed in the robe of a divine decree’. He thinks that if theologians in the past had originated divine election from Christ’s death on the cross and from his resurrection they would not have reached this faulty conclusion (Barth 1937b[1936]:26). Instead of the two groups of predestined humans, Barth speaks about double predestination in terms of God’s electing and rejecting *activity*, that is, God’s act of accepting or rejecting happens in the actual encounter of human beings with the self-revealing God in Christ. He thinks this is what Romans 9-11 speaks about: ‘God’s righteousness, but at the same time his gracious love, determine the participation of man once in the light of grace and once in the shadow of judgement’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:27). Barth’s opinion about the classical doctrine of predestination is that ‘at this point the divine *either-or* confronting us in Jesus Christ and the royal prerogative contained in his call was made impermissibly anthropologic, mechanical and fixed’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:27). As a result all kinds of semi-Pelagian positions were adopted that made ineffective the ‘comforting power of our praising the *gracious* God and that of the doctrine of predestination’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:27).

e. The Assurance of Election

Starting from the specific interpretation of double predestination, Barth excludes the possibility of establishing with any certainty those who belong to the elected ones and who to the reprobate ones. He thinks, the doctrine should rather concentrate our attention on *acknowledgement, confidence and obedience*.

We need to *acknowledge*, says Barth that our life, in any circumstances, is in God's hands. He argues from Romans 11:32 that '*God has bound all men over to disobedience, so that he might have mercy on them all*'. According to Barth the expression *all men* 'excludes on the one hand the possibility that the elected ones might not be threatened by the danger of being rejected, and on the other hand the possibility that the rejected ones might not share in the promise of election' (Barth 1937b[1936]:29). In Barth's exposition the human freedom that comes to the surface is fulfilled in the obedience of man. 'Divine reprobation', says Barth,

is manifested exactly in the fact that God makes it possible for us to be ourselves, he hands us over to ourselves, makes us the slaves of ourselves, that is he leaves us without grace, that we might be our own masters, but at the same time he lets us fight against grace, and accomplish our own will (Barth 1937b[1936]:29).

The knowledge of our election results in our *confidence* that 'the divine predestination of our lives comes indeed from God, and just because of this fact we will reach our life goal set in the divine decree' (Barth 1937b[1936]:31). But how do we know that we are elected? Barth's answer is: we are elected when we say *yes* to our election realised in Jesus Christ. The confidence, however, does not rest on the human decision, but on the knowledge that Jesus Christ bore our reprobation for us. Barth agrees with Calvin in saying that if Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit accomplishes our election then 'we find the assurance about our election not in ourselves' (Inst III.xxiv.5). We can be sure about our election if we can say that God, the source and object of our faith, is ours and he also testifies that we are his.

Barth relates positively to the issue of human freedom and importance of human decision, but he places it between the boundaries of *obedience*. ‘To be elected’, he says, ‘means that we need to recognise over us the rule of the one who gave himself for us that we might no longer live for ourselves but for the one, who died and was risen for us’ (Barth 1937b[1936]:33, 2Co 15:15). The fact of our election, strengthened by the comfort of the gospels, makes us stand in front of God’s disciplining commandment and before his law.

3. Responses to Barth’s Doctrine of Predestination

Barth’s greatest challenge to Calvin’s doctrine was in asserting its Christological foundation. He found it compatible with his understanding of the Word of God to regard Jesus Christ, as God’s own elected one, but at the same time as his rejected one too, who accomplished man’s own election and reprobation. By this, Barth not only dissolved the twofold division of men into predestined to life and predestined to damnation, but at the same time freed man from under the great burden of ‘religious’ determinism and placed him directly in the presence of his gracious God, that he might relate to the address of his Word in full knowledge of his responsibility.

Karl Barth’s visit to Transylvania – beyond the glamour of the honour and its strategic importance for the future of dialectical theology in the land – can be regarded as a real theological challenge. The challenge consisted in thoroughly applying the principle of the Word of God and a Christological perspective to the whole body of theology, even with the price of going beyond the boundaries of traditionally accepted confessional Calvinism. Reactions to the challenge were less than expected. While the processing of practical themes began before the visit continued, neither the issues that Barth’s lecture raised, nor his further theological development was seriously considered by the Hungarian theologians, with the exception of reviewing some topics from the

continuously appearing volumes of *Church Dogmatics*. When Barth criticised the classical form of predestination, he in fact indirectly hit the position of Hungarian theologians.

a. Tavaszy's Doctrine of Predestination Before Barth's Lecture

Sándor Tavaszy dealt with the doctrine of predestination in two of his writings in the 30s before Barth's visit. In his dogmatics, in 1932, he devoted a whole chapter to the issue.¹ From a methodological perspective, he thought of the doctrine as having the role of a summary, since 'on the one hand it sums up and concludes, and on the other hand... like a frame, embraces all the doctrinal parts of dogmatics, and gives a certain artistic isolation to the whole' (Tavaszy 1932c:244). For this reason, Tavaszy thinks that 'Calvinistic predestination' is a characteristic of Reformed theology (Tavaszy 1933a). Contrary to Barth, Tavaszy conferred a primary role to the doctrine of predestination, but not an entirely independent one, since it sums up all Christian doctrines.

Tavaszy, like Barth himself, first refers to the grace of God in connection with the doctrine. In his opinion, both scripture and the confessions speak about 'God's unconditioned grace'. Nevertheless he does not perceive the universality and sovereignty of grace, but considers grace to be predestined. For this reason he considers with Calvin that the election of grace is supralapsarian and regards it outside of Christ and prior to his sacrifice. 'We call predestination' – he attempts a definition – 'God's eternal decree, by which he decided in himself, what happens with every single man, according to his will. God did not create everybody for the same condition. Some he

¹ Several years before, Albert Maksay maintained a rigid position on the issue. He spoke about a cosmic predestination (in this world everything happens according to God's decreeing power) and a soteriological predestination. The goal of the latter is to restore man to the condition of salvation and is only the special case of the former. According to Maksay: 'The main characteristic of divine decreeing and electing will is not forgiveness and grace, but the majesty and sovereignty of God, its power above all powers and its perfection in itself (Maksay 1929:74).

created, right from the beginning, for eternal life and some for eternal damnation’ (Tavaszy 1932c:247, Inst III.xxi.51).

Tavaszy follows Calvin in saying that the necessary correlate of election is reprobation (Tavaszy 1932c:256). He is not yet sensitive to those ‘infiltrations’ Barth spoke about in his lecture, namely reference to human logic and human experience in the doctrine of predestination. Tavaszy and László Ravasz, maintain that the source of the doctrine of predestination is revelation (Tavaszy 1932c:250, Ravasz nd:4), although they also refer heavily to human experience (Ravasz nd:5, Tavaszy 1932c:251). The Barthian perception, that God is free both in election and reprobation and that instead of two groups of people we rather need to speak about God’s electing and rejecting activity, is in opposition to Tavaszy’s rigid position. He rejected the idea according to which ‘besides the ones elected to salvation God might wait patiently for others to be saved’. Such a thought would have been unimaginable for Tavaszy since this would mean ‘pulling God once to the right and once to the left’. He rather thinks that God rules with mighty power and not with tolerance. God’s will is resting on his eternal decree not on the incidental daily occurrences (Tavaszy 1932c:257). Looking to Tavaszy’s position we can really value that Barth grounded the explanation of election and reprobation christologically. Nevertheless, the rigidity of Tavaszy’s position is ameliorated by his constant affirmation that this doctrine actually is ‘the confession of grace known in revelation’ (Tavaszy 1932c:259).

Paralleling Barth’s doctrine to the one maintained by Tavaszy at the moment of his visit in 1936, we could clearly see the challenge Barth addressed and the potential possibilities for bringing the standpoint of other theologians to a more flexible position.

b. The Doctrine of Predestination After Barth's Challenge

In the late 1930s and early 1940s there were no serious critical works written about Barth's theology. It seems that from this lethargy only the 60s and 70s brought a certain awakening. But those who made their voice heard were the next generation of theologians.

In one of his lectures, popularising dialectical theology for the Reformed pastors, András Cs. Tunyogi makes reference to Barth's doctrine of predestination, too (Tunyogi 1936:134-135). He pays attention to the fact that Barth views this doctrine christologically and that he refers both sides of predestination to the same whole. Man in his whole reality is condemned to perdition, nevertheless is elected by God. Since Tunyogi was inspired mainly by *The Epistle to the Romans*, he uses the dialectical language of the early Barth. The call for salvation – he says – refers to man insofar as he is a personality [in Christ] that is not in the physical world because it exists in the reality of faith. Man is damned, but nevertheless, according to his 'other personality', that is not in this world, is saved. This is why it can be said that salvation is only by faith. God does not look to man's reprobate personality, but looks to his saved personality in Christ. 'So there are two worlds facing each other with such a contrast' – says Tunyogi – 'that one is annihilating the other, and at the border of these two is man, who, due to his specific situation exists in both. In the human world he exists as one damned, in the divine world as one saved. The former then refers to reprobation, and the latter refers to predestination to salvation' (Tunyogi 1936:135).

The concrete reaction to Barth's doctrine of predestination happened in 1963 from the pen of Pál Geréb, which formally was a review of the relevant part of CD II.2 [1942]. Interestingly enough, Geréb does not enter in dialogue with Barth, but only states his opinion about Barth's position at the end of his review: 'Studying Barth's doctrine of predestination, we see that by establishing through scripture his whole

teaching on the reality of Jesus Christ, he gave back to predestination its character of good news, that the traditional doctrine was able to interpret only ambiguously' (Geréb P 1963:298).

We can only guess the reason for the lack of theological analysis. Was it the desire to escape the confrontation with the Communist censorship? This cannot stand, since with the occasion of Barth's death in 1968 and centenary in 1986, in the same magazine, good studies were published in a time when Communist censorship was even harsher. Perhaps the desire to avoid confrontation with the opinion of the church leaders or theologians was the issue. If this were true, it would show that Reformed theology in Transylvania was not willing, or ready, to give up its confessional Calvinism for a more flexible theological position.

Geréb's review was not effective enough to root Barth's doctrine of predestination in the Reformed theology of Transylvania. We can see this from an article published in 1987, in which László Varga aims to consider the doctrine of predestination from a biblical perspective (Varga 1987). Varga argues that scripture presents God as omnipotent and sovereign and he regrets the fact that theology after Barth departed from this issue. Varga considers the content of predestination pertaining not only to salvation, and he wants to extend it to the entirety of human existence. Varga thinks that election is the integration of man into God's world-plan. He maintains that God is looking for personal relationship with all men, but this relationship is not determined or exhausted in a spiritual condition, but is expressed by the task God gives to each of his children (Varga 1987:390). God also gives the best condition and circumstances in order that man may fulfil his task. The task predestined by God for each Christian is so important that its recognition and fulfilment leads to the fulfilment of human personality. This position confers to the doctrine of predestination a hint of activist humanism.

On the basis of scripture – thinks Varga – nobody can tell that God preordained anybody to damnation. Quite the opposite: ‘one can gain the salvation of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, if one sincerely asks and bestirs oneself to obedient following’. If somebody is damned this is not because ‘one was predestined to it, but because one rejected his own destiny’ (Varga 1987:393). Varga tries to solve the tension of double predestination by giving to it a personal answer instead of a theoretical one. His response is: ‘This is God’s message to you, as an individual: Christ saved you, your salvation is ready; do, what you should! Nobody will ever get the answer that he must perish’ (Varga 1987:395).

Surprisingly, Varga even attempts to discharge Calvin from the charge of double predestination (he does not argue, just affirms). The stumbling block of double predestination, in his opinion, rests with the theologians that explain salvation only in connection with this doctrine. The reason God predestines people is not mentioned, and this is true – unfortunately – of the II Helvet Confession, too – complains Varga. The fact that Varga – without referring to Barth² – emulates ideas that were first presented in Transylvania by Barth indicates that Barth’s lecture in 1936 and his position on the issue in CD II.2 had at least some effect on the Reformed church in Transylvania.

Earlier on István Horváth’s booklet,³ intended to popularise theology, contains some elements from the lecture that Barth presented in Kolozsvár. Horváth also begins with stating that predestination is a fact of faith and it can be understood where faith has its centre: at the cross of grace. In his opinion, too, predestination is a secondary doctrine, and is ‘horrible’ only for those who want to consider it separately from other

² He mentions Barth only once in his paper, when he refers to the way Barth interpreted double predestination. Varga however does not follow Barth on that and does not have any dialogue with him on this issue.

³ The date of the publication does not appear on it, but from its content it seems that it was the end of the 30s or the early years of the 40s.

doctrines, ‘in itself, without grace and the cross’ (Horváth I nd:48). Horváth indicates that the doctrine of predestination can be only the commentary to the doctrine of grace. In the issue of double predestination he also inclines towards a Barthian position, although he does not mention Barth at all in his work. The cross of Golgotha stood for everybody – says Horváth – and the grace of God has reached all men. He thinks that Jesus Christ is the elected and the reprobate one of God; in him our election and rejection is realised. Reprobation, he says, is ‘the other side of predestination’, but election and reprobation are neither of equal proportion in predestination, nor do they complement each other. Through the story of the prodigal son he illustrates that ‘all rejection is in the service of election. Jesus Christ took upon himself our damnation, that to all who are damned, he might offer his grace and by the Holy Spirit he might make them accept it’ (Horváth I nd:68). Horváth considers predestination to be the greatest comfort, since we witness the coming home of the prodigal sons all over the world. The coming home is not evident in everybody, but we need to refrain from judging people. Horváth also agrees with Barth in the fact that he regards election and damnation as two phases of life’s journey rather than two groups of people. Hence, those who look rejected today ‘were left by Christ in damnation not so that they would be lost, but so that the elected ones might lead them to Christ’ (Horváth I nd:69).

There was no concrete reaction to Barth’s lecture in 1936 and his doctrine of predestination by the first generation of dialectical theologians in Transylvania. Those whom we might expect to react were silent. Barth’s person and his overall theological activity were much appreciated on the occasion of the visit, but the professors of the Theological Faculty did not openly take up the challenge of his lecture.

We saw that the next generation of theologians dealt with the issue, but mainly on the level of a review (Geréb). They did not show up the difference in position between Barth and the Transylvanian theologians on the issue of predestination, but

rather just stated that Barth's position is more faithful to the revelation in Jesus Christ. The Barthian approach to the doctrine of predestination, namely to put in the centre of it the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, was not built into their theological thinking. This fact leaves us to infer that Transylvanian Reformed theology could not follow Barth in his pursuit towards a more Christological definition of the Word of God. We will see below that the literary evidences show that the theology of the Word of God in Transylvania followed the early stage of Barthian dialectical theology with an emphasis on the dialectical Word of God. Furthermore, the approach we witnessed to the Barthian theology of the Word indicates that dialectical theology, as Barth put it forward, was in fact the means of reviving Calvinism and did not go beyond its classical and confessional form.

F. Christology as a Method

Calvin's doctrine of election is defective because it is not able to articulate satisfactorily the grace of God towards all people and is fixed in a rigid dualism as far as God's eternal will is concerned. The reason behind this failing is in his view of God. Calvin's God is a sovereign God, the Lord over life and death, the only judge of the universe. In Calvin's theology Christology is less important; it is a chapter of his theology but not the governing factor of it. It can be said that for Calvin Christ is the means *through* whom we know God.

For Barth Christology is important methodologically as well. We know God not only through Christ, but *in* Christ. He is the medium, the inner logic of our knowledge of God – this is the central motif, that characterises Barth's theology, says Hunsinger (1991:229). In articulating this idea Barth is consistent with his Christological model in the doctrine of the knowledge of God, of Scripture and that of eternal election of God.

Barth knows a God who is giving himself to others through Jesus Christ and since Jesus Christ is best known as God's revelation on the cross, the theology of Barth bears the mark of the cross too. We know God more truly in this self giving of God in Jesus Christ. From this view of God Barth is able to articulate his doctrine of election through the prism of God's universal grace towards man. The weakness of Barth's theology stands exactly in its strength, the danger of an automatic and determined universalism. Although Barth never draws this conclusion and never wanted to reach this point, this is the danger of his theory. When Barth first presented this doctrine of election during his visit to Hungary and Transylvania in 1936 (Berkouwer 1956:89), he was asked whether universal grace eliminates reprobation. He answered:

We can be certain that God's lordship is and will be total in all, but what this signifies for us we must leave to God. And therefore we dare not say that in the universal grace damnation is eliminated; the Holy Scripture speaks of election and of rejection (quoted by Berkouwer in 1956:114).

The logically inevitable reality of an *apokatastasis* cannot be accepted by Barth, because parallel with the universality of faith we need to uphold the idea of rejection for those who do not believe. Barth's argument is not based on a philosophical presupposition but rather on the nature of grace as he conceives it. Berkouwer quotes Barth saying: 'for grace which would in the end automatically have to reach and embrace everyone and anyone would certainly not be sovereign, would not be divine grace' (Berkouwer 1956:115).

Barth's Christological approach, however, became the central feature of his theology and proved to be a very fruitful method. As we have seen in Chapter II his treatment of doctrines such as nature and grace, natural theology, revelation, *analogia fidei* and the Word of God is based on what God does in Christ. His results may not satisfy everybody, but nevertheless are coherent in his system. To understand and to

appreciate Karl Barth's theology presupposes the appreciation of his 'Christological concentration' and acceptance of it as a working method in theologising.

In my opinion the degree of success of Barth's reception in Transylvania in revitalising theology lies exactly in this matter. We have already seen that one of the main issues was in which way Barthian thought could respond to the charge of cultural alienation. In the impact of dialectical theology on the indigenous theological thinking, dialectical theology was in need of formulating a new theology of culture. As we have seen in Chapter II, from the initial opposition of God to world, Barth found a way forward by means of a more Christological approach, which gave him the possibility for a more positive approach to culture. If one were to do the same in Transylvania, founding a theology of culture on dialectical theology, one would have no other alternative than to follow the same path Barth followed. However, the affirmation of culture by Transylvanian theologians was based on other theological tendencies, including a resort to Calvin's view of the knowledge of God in nature.

G. Summary

Tavaszy's claim that dialectical theology is consistent and coherent with Calvinism is only partly true and is in need of certain clarification.

In the first place, both traditional Calvinism and dialectical theology are Scripture theologies, but the Bible signifies different things for them. Calvin's understanding of the Bible is more dogmatic and facilitates the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Second, Barth's understanding of the Bible is more appropriate in the historical context of post-biblical criticism and gives a corrective to the destructive view of the Bible of both orthodoxy and liberalism. As far as the third issue of God's election is concerned, Barth and Calvin are on a different wavelength. Barth, while preserving the fundamental

principles of Protestant theology, constructs a doctrine of election which rests on a more fertile view of God. He is able to articulate better the universal character of God's grace and has a more adequate understanding of faith in which election is made actual. Nevertheless Barth's approach bears the danger of an automatic apokatastasis, which Barth attempts to avoid by appealing to the mystery of God.

The claim that dialectical theology is 'Calvinism at best' was either a statement based on lack of information or a refusal to take up the challenge of Barth's Christological method. My argument in this thesis is that the Transylvanians could have known about Barth's new theological development, which was already significantly marked by the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* in 1932. Tavaszy and his colleagues might have felt that it was not necessary for them to fully follow Barth's theological journey, since they already had reached what they desired in theology.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEOLOGY OF SÁNDOR TAVASZY AND HIS ROLE IN THE RECEPTION OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY

In this chapter I pay special attention to the theology of Sándor Tavaszy. Since he has been one of the major figures of the Hungarian Reformed theology of the twentieth century and played a major role in the reception of Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God in Transylvania, I dedicate a whole chapter to studying his theology. As we have seen in Chapter IV, he was the main exponent of that model of reception which regarded dialectical theology as the agent of a new reformation in the Protestant world – especially in Transylvania. Tavaszy has influenced a whole generation of theologians and his ideas were taken up or adopted by the majority of other Transylvanian theologians and pastors.

The goal of this chapter is to determine the impact of Barth's theology of the Word of God on Sándor Tavaszy and to attempt to delineate the shape and the content of Tavaszy's theology after this impact. For this reason first we look at Tavaszy's theological journey from liberal theology to dialectical theology then we examine the way that he understood the Word of God in revelation. Finally we investigate how Tavaszy emulated Barth's theology in his own theological thinking.

A. From Karl Böhm to Karl Barth: The Emergence of the Idea of the Word of God in the Theological Development of Sándor Tavaszy

Sándor Tavaszy went through several periods or stages in his development as a theologian. The periods of his development however are not easy to determine. Being a person whose heart beat in the rhythm of his time, he walked the paths of liberalism, Confessional Calvinism and dialectical theology from *kulturprotestantismus* to home mission movements. Tavaszy's development, says Tamás Juhász, is an unbroken line, without dramatic changes; 'the theological *metanoia* can be described only by the changes of the subjects in his life-work' (Juhász T 1996:287). Tavaszy himself was reluctant to talk about any 'metanoia', 'periods of development' or 'schools' related to his theological activities, challenging every kind of categorisation of the commentators. This might be due to the fact that he looked to his own life and thought as to something inclusive, open to take in different (sometimes seemingly conflicting) ideas like philosophical idealism, Calvinism and the Barthian theology of the Word of God. By this approach he reflected, and at the same time set the example for a scholarly approach to the humanities in the early part of twentieth century Transylvania.

1. Ideas of Revelation in Tavaszy's Thinking Before the Challenge of Dialectical Theology

In the first period of his activity, Tavaszy can be characterised as a philosopher. It is still an open question whether Tavaszy ceased to be a philosopher after his impact with dialectical theology. According to Tamás Juhász he did, and he became a theologian in his own right (Juhász T 1968:507). Dezső László, however, thinks that Tavaszy 'remained a philosopher even after he became an authentic theologian' (László 1982:373). Since these categories do not necessarily exclude each other, in my opinion,

it is not important whether Tavaszy was a philosopher or a theologian. Nevertheless it is important to see whether his theological and philosophical thinking are in harmony or in conflict. From his writings it is evident that even when he dealt with theological issues he could not hide his interest in philosophy, and collaterally with theological works he produced philosophical ones as well: one third of his life-work consists of philosophical writings.

Philosophically, Tavaszy took the position of a modified neo-Kantianism put forward by Karl Böhm, a position which was congenial with the study of religion school that regarded revelation as immanent in human culture (Juhász T 1996:288). Under Böhm's influence the issues of epistemology (and scientific knowledge), idealistic interpretation of religion, revelation and the human soul were the reference points in Tavaszy's philosophical-theological investigations. The idea of revelation for Tavaszy is not central in this period and when it appears here and there in the discussion in general philosophy of religion it bears the characteristic of that specific discourse. The nature of the idea of revelation in this specific discourse is mainly reflected in Tavaszy's thought on culture and religion.

Tavaszy in his article 'The Philosophy of Mankind's Life' published in 1917, develops the issue shown in the title with strong bearings on Karl Böhm's axiology. According to Tavaszy the laws of the same logos rule the life of the whole of humanity, which rules the individuals: these are 'the historical laws of the Logos'. Referring to Böhm Tavaszy says:

The Spirit is given to us in the human spirit, to such an extent that its correlative, the World-Spirit, that is God, reveals himself through the glorified individual spirit. In the first man, as a possibility, the whole history, the whole culture is present. There is nowhere a single stroke, a single dash that is not the creation of the human spirit (Tavaszy 1917:418).

Here we witness the same modification of Böhm's philosophy as we saw in Makkai's case. Tavaszy, like Makkai (see II.C.2.c.), starting with the concept of the spirit in Böhm talked about the universal Spirit to which Böhm did not make reference. With this step both Tavaszy and Makkai went beyond Böhm, and for Tavaszy this step was in fact a step towards a more Hegelian philosophy of the Spirit. Thus, according to Tavaszy, the history of the world, as in Hegel himself, is the manifestation of the Spirit: the human spirit, in which the universal Spirit is given, creates culture from itself. He makes reference to the Böhmian self, which formulates value judgements and posits itself realises itself in culture. The self-realisation of the Spirit is accomplished through its prolongations, which, according to Böhm are 'all those means through which the self opens up its reality beyond its physical boundaries' (cited in Tavaszy 1917:419). Through this opening up the Spirit becomes a common property. History, concludes Tavaszy, corresponds with the creation of a self-valuing Spirit, which is culture (Tavaszy 1917:430). In this conception Tavaszy, in a quasi-Hegelian manner, thinks that revelation is the manifestation of the Spirit in culture through individual selves, without even mentioning the issues relating to the Christian concept of revelation.

The concept of World-Spirit governs not only Tavaszy's philosophy of culture, but also his philosophy of religion, where he proves himself to be a rational idealist. The task of philosophy is not the same as that of religion, thinks Tavaszy, but both have an epistemological character. Philosophy as a scientific discipline enquires about the facts reflectively and classifies them according to certain principles. But because intelligence is not exhausted in intellectual functions, 'religion, as a manifestation of the human spirit, when it investigates general problems by the epistemological method (construction), receives a philosophical character and becomes the subject of a philosophical discipline, namely philosophy of religion' (Tavaszy 1912:550).

Tavaszy's ideas about divine revelation are inside the boundaries permitted by his theological position. As a theologian devoted to the study of religion school, he conceives revelation as immanent in human culture, where it develops through the self-establishment of individual spirits. Tavaszy's 'kulturprotestantismus' however had no deviations towards a militant nationalism.

2. Transition to Dialectical Theology

I already hinted above that the division of Sándor Tavaszy's activities into certain periods eludes our attempts at neat separation. His transition from the liberal position of philosophy of religion to dialectical theology was made slowly. It is not unfounded to say that turning from a history of theology school and from an idealist philosophy to a Calvinist theology can be regarded as the greatest turn in Tavaszy's life. This 'conversion', however, like the taking on board of dialectical theology, was not accompanied by any self-criticism or any reference to his former position. It begins with increasing interest in Calvinism (or later dialectical theology) and continues with a scholarly analysis of systems, first Calvinism and later dialectical theology. In the early 1920s the main emphases in Tavaszy's writings were on issues related to Calvinism as a world view and life system. Issues related to a conservative Calvinist theology coloured by certain references to Barth and the new theology came to the foreground. The confessional Calvinist movement in Transylvania received a new impetus when Sándor Makkai was appointed professor at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Kolozsvár in 1918, and became bishop in 1926 (Makkai 1990:75ff.). The existential factor that turned

Tavaszy towards this conservative approach was his appointment to the same faculty, first as a professor of church history and then as a professor of dogmatics.¹

In the middle of 1920s, Tavaszy's life and work was characterised by the overlapping of preoccupations and theological positions. He published his first article on dialectical theology in 1923. Nevertheless it takes up to 1928-29 for Tavaszy to recognise the full implications of dialectical theology and to embrace it. His liberal preoccupations will not end in 1923. We find articles on the topics characteristic of his first period such as science and culture in the late twenties, too. In this period a new emphasis is laid on topics like worldview, Calvinism and its world-mission.

The commentators on Tavaszy's life usually speak about three stages within it; liberal theology (philosophy of value), confessional Calvinism, and dialectical theology. Contrary to this interpretation we consider Tavaszy's theological development as a unity in which various positions were taken without the working out of a coherent system of thought. The more clear-cut change of position is a shift from an interest purely in philosophy of religion towards a theological orientation in a more classical sense. In the period we are just looking at we can observe certain issues that kept Tavaszy's thought on the move and, which, in fact facilitated his drifting towards dialectical theology. These issues, namely *crisis*, *irrationality* and the *problem of religion*, however, mainly emerge – in contrast to Barth – from the search of a thinking mind rather than from a theological or spiritual search.

In my opinion the emergence of *the idea of crisis* and a preoccupation in helping the Reformed people to confront it is an important step of an otherwise optimistic

¹ Tamás Juhász in his study on Tavaszy's theological development adds other factors, which might have facilitated his advance to Calvinism. He says: 'There are two factors we do not analyse, since we have not enough data to prove their origin, but which undoubtedly were there deep at the roots of his life-work. One is the *praxis pietatis* brought from the family and homeland, the other his pledge to home mission and church... Both received their practical expression in the activities of the *Vécsi Convention*, a circle of friends for pastors.' Juhász T 1988:508.

theologian towards an opening up to Barth's ideas in which the idea of 'crisis' also plays an important role. In Chapter IV (A.1), I already mentioned that Tavaszy saw a new way out of the crisis his generation had got into. Here we may now see the role of this perceived crisis in modelling Tavaszy's thought. In 1923 shortly after the second edition of Barth's *Romans*, he published a collection of essays entitled *The Spiritual Crises of Today – A Critical Guide* (1923a) in which he states that the historical crisis that embraces all the aspects of life – religion, worldview, arts and science – threatens the existence of the whole culture (Tavaszy 1923a:2). The crisis in contemporary religion is manifested in the weakening of its inspiring power; ordinary religious people cannot find satisfaction for their religious needs in the Christian Church. 'Only idle and gaping souls' – says Tavaszy – 'do not see that a mighty army of the souls who live in the arms of Christianity are blundering away towards marshy paths created by raging waters' (Tavaszy 1923a:5f.). Tavaszy was not sure at that time about the outcome of the general crisis but he was 'deeply convinced that after the temporary depreciation of great values the culture of Western-Europe will face a new and exciting perspective' (Tavaszy 1923a:63). Tavaszy did not yet refer to the Word of God that might be a solution to the crisis, but instead to the attempt of human endeavour to balance the externalisation produced by a technical civilisation with the deepness and purity of a proper spiritual culture.

A significant step forward in the thinking of Tavaszy from his rational-idealistic position was the discovery and welcome of the concept of *irrationalism*, which prepared the way for a more theological/traditional understanding of revelation. 'In place of rationalism stepped irrationalism', said Tavaszy, 'and our spiritual life today needs to be safeguarded not from the exaggerations of rationalism but from a polluted form of irrationalism' (Tavaszy 1923a:11). The rational way – according to Tavaszy – includes forming of notions, association of ideas, conceptualisation, judgements, deduction,

knowledge and thinking. This mental activity results in generalisations, which ‘peel off the individual stamp from spiritual facts, deprive the facts from particular freshness, tie them in rigid forms, so that through this means reason may secure for ever their precise and identical grasp’ (Tavaszy 1923a:13). Rationalism proceeds step by step in the process of knowing – said Tavaszy. Irrationalism, however, struggles with the whole of the spirit, with the whole of the phenomenon. Tavaszy conceives irrationalism as a way of grasping things in which both *intuition* (the grasp of the essence of the phenomenon) and *encounter* (an inner experience) are included. By these means irrationalism, since it is a single spiritual act combining intuition and experience, takes possession of the phenomenon. ‘Irrational intuition or encounter’ says Tavaszy, ‘can make rational creations its object, but the rational even with the greatest impetus can grasp only a smaller percentage of irrational experience’ (Tavaszy 1923a:14). Tavaszy saw the presence of irrationalism in the resurgence of idealism in philosophy, in the concept of the *numinous* of Rudolf Otto, and in Karl Barth’s *Der Römerbrief*. In connection with this work Tavaszy states something which was alien to his thinking up to this moment, namely that religion is God’s real power, so it is ‘independent of all cultures, it is an independent absolute reality’ (Tavaszy 1923a:21). ‘Barth’, says Tavaszy, ‘is searching for the irrational facts of religion which can be grasped only with the hidden power of spirituality, with the whole momentum of the soul; these [irrational facts] we need to acknowledge as the heartbeat and inner propelling power of religion’ (Tavaszy 1923a:21). Tavaszy affirms that the ‘blessings of irrationalism’ balance the negative effects of rationalism, which ‘reveal only a little part of our spirituality’, while irrationality ‘opens up immeasurable depths’. Tavaszy’s attention is slipping from the human side of religion to God, since he appreciates what irrationalism brings in connection with the idea of God. This step is only a formal statement about God, but still important:

If we look [...] to the centre of the worldview and religion's way of looking at the Absolute, to the idea of God, we need to say immediately, that vis-à-vis the enrichment which irrationalism brings, the features, concepts and data provided by rationalism seem to be very sickly and painfully illusion-breaking. Through the incentives of irrationalism we reached the blessed and eternal spring of our spiritual life (Tavaszy 1923a:24).

Tavaszy's positive approach to irrationalism does not mean that he embraced it entirely and without any critical view. Without conceptualisation with proper logical force and precision irrational facts and experiences become uncertain and illusory. Tavaszy's position in 1923 is that rationalism and irrationalism should be kept in balance (Tavaszy 1923a:25), but this task seems to have escaped its fulfilment in Tavaszy's thinking. As we shall see in what follows, Tavaszy did not take on board an irrational outlook since in his philosophical thinking he reverted to a more rationalistic view than his statements in 1923 would have predicted.

In the Transylvanian reception of dialectical theology the *issue of religion* as a human phenomenon plays an important role. In almost every presentation of dialectical theology at that time Tavaszy made reference to the way dialectical theology changes the concept of religion from a cultural immanent concept into a personal encounter with God through His Word. In 1924 in his speech on the occasion of the opening of the academic year entitled *Ways Leading to God*,² Tavaszy for the first time makes an analysis of religion from a historical-theological point of view (Tavaszy 1924a:148).

According to Tavaszy, Schleiermacher, under the influence of *Aufklärung*, wanted to explain the religious phenomena inside the realm of the sensible world as a human, psychological phenomenon. Modern theology of the nineteenth and twentieth century, said Tavaszy, building on this concept of revelation has been governed by the principle that the object of theology is not God, but religious man. Doing so theology has become

² This speech marks the beginning of his activity as the director of the theological faculty for eight years.

a scientific discipline, namely philosophy of religion. Tavaszy criticises this development making reference first to Gogarten's and then to Brunner's critique of it, pointing out – following Gogarten – that since modern philosophy of religion changed the object of theology it has lost the gospel of Christ. Tavaszy takes on board the preoccupation of the early dialectical theologians.

Theology must elaborate the treasure, which is in the gospels in such a way that all the depths and heights of the divine system of value may shine through. It is not enough to make alive only the immanent historical context of the gospels, but their value-realities have to be revived; the redeeming powers need to be revealed that are behind the letters, words and sentences. The letters are only the scaffolds, dumb Mammon-statues that resound only for the approach of kindred-souls, and they resound in such a way that through their sound we hear the voice of eternity (Tavaszy 1924a:151).

This quotation shows that in Tavaszy's thinking several influences are present, such as liberalism coloured by value theology, critical thinking and some ideas about the Word of God. From his personal insight, he exhibits several features of a later Barthian theology of the Word of God. He seems to be convinced that the historical-critical approach is not sufficient to reveal the spiritual content of the gospel and that the words of the Scripture are only means through which the eternal voice of God reaches us. In this light Tavaszy reconsiders his view on theology as philosophy of religion and attempts to articulate a new conception of revelation. 'Theology', he says, 'is indeed philosophy of religion as long as it deals with the subjective experience of the religious man and with the textual criticism of the gospels; but it turns into [authentic] theology when it becomes the possessor of revelations through inspiration from the living God, and can justify these revelations according to its specific method as eternal realities and absolute norms' (Tavaszy 1924a:151).

This formulation is not a pure theology of the Word yet, but its significance is that Tavaszy made a distinction between two types of theological discourse: one a philosophy of religion type, and one that is based on revelation. There is more to clarify

here, such as the ideas expressed by 'possessor of revelation' and the idea of 'revelations', in the plural. As we have seen in Chapter III Barth would not talk about us 'possessing' revelation, but rather us being grasped by it. He also excluded other revelations outside and alongside Jesus Christ. Tavaszy became aware of the damage philosophy of religion has made to the church, dealing unilaterally with the subjective-human aspect of religion. By this, without explicitly wanting it, philosophy of religion 'weakened the staggering and awesome effect of the living God' (Tavaszy 1924a:152). Tavaszy, as a natural consequence of the above, felt the need to look for the idea of the possibility of an encounter with God. But he rejected the 'mystical way' as a right encounter with God since 'in spite of all its ecstasy, the mystical soul will not rise above its given natural barriers. There is only one way left for the encounter with God: the Word' (Tavaszy 1924a:154).

This is the first time that Tavaszy uses the concept of the Word in connection with revelation and religion. This leads to a reversed use of the concept of the *transcendental* compared to the first period. While the Kantian and neo-Kantian use of the transcendental (idea) refers to the noumenal, it is still the product of human reason. Through it one tries to make sense of the incomprehensible, beyond-phenomenal world. However, the Word of God, as in Barth, always reaches us from above; it is not our word, but addresses us from the outside. This is the reason that the emergence of the idea of the Word is an important step in Tavaszy's development.

Those who hear the Word of God are 'the mystics of the word', for without the Word we stumble on our way of reflection into the trap of philosophy, says Tavaszy. He emphasised that the Word of God is life and, quoting and following Calvin, Tavaszy links the life that reaches us in the Word to the person of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith. In 1928 he is even bolder in condemning religion as a human endeavour and makes true faith dependent on God's revelation.

[W]e contrast religion as a human creation with religion based on the self-realism of God's revelation given in the Word of God. Religion as a human creation is of a psychological, historical and axiological nature. Its importance rests on its function and is explicated on that basis. Religion as the expression of the effect of the revelation of the Word of God is not psychological, since it is independent of any experience; it is not historical in nature since it is independent of historical facts (adottság), and it is not axiological in nature, since any idea of value created by the human spirit is not decisive for it (Tavaszy 1928b:10).

Thus Tavaszy arrived at a concept of religion characteristic of dialectical theology, a move which is significantly distanced from his earlier position. In the year Barth published his *Christian Dogmatics* the affinity of Tavaszy's thinking with Barth's is quite remarkable. He differentiated between religion as a human creation and as the expression of the effect of revelation made it possible to condemn religion as a human creation that presented itself in two forms: Christian theological liberalism and the 'fellowship movement of experience-Christianity'. By the latter Tavaszy understood the revivalist fellowship groups in the church (the evangelical movement); he is ready to leave the former and attack the latter (Tavaszy 1928b:14f.).

In this period of transition therefore, we can see some important changes in the thinking of Sándor Tavaszy. We cannot speak of a clear theological position as far as the theology of the Word of God is concerned until the end of the twenties. However some important elements of dialectical theology, or building blocks of thought-forms that facilitated the reception, are evident.

Tavaszy in this period was driven by his personal position and work in the church towards the idea of the renewal of the Reformed church. He became aware of the shortcomings of the liberal position and its failure to inspire living faith. The concept of crisis was applied not only to the church but also to the entire society and culture of his day. This was the reason why he was looking for a new theological and cultural era to emerge in Western Europe. The expectation of a new era went hand in hand with the condemnation of philosophy of religion, which held him so strongly for about ten years.

As a consequence of this his attention was guided to Barth's dialectical theology and he discovered a new interpretation of revelation and an understanding of the Word of God.

3. The first Impact of Dialectical Theology

In the thinking of Sándor Tavaszy the effect of dialectical theology could be felt after 1928. Dialectical theology and especially that of Barth, affected him in the orientation and in the major guidelines of his theological thinking. In this section I intend to point towards certain features of his discovery of the Barthian dialectical theology.

Tavaszy would not call himself a dialectical theologian, in the sense that he might be a close follower of Barth or Brunner. In the preface to his *Reformed Christian Dogmatics* he gives an important guideline for measuring his theological position.

I learned much from Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, from these really great theologians of our days, which were driven by the passion of faith. [...] But if I can say that I learned much from dialectical theology, I need to add that I learned most from Calvin. [...] Whatever I gained from others, whatever I learned from dialectical theology, I measured against Calvin, and against the Word from the Scripture, and that against the Word incarnate, the living Word, who is Christ (Tavaszy 1932c:viii).

Tavaszy's theological position then is not one of being pure Barthian or dialectical, although he is the closest to Barth among the Transylvanian Reformed theologians. His self-confessed Calvinism should not escape our attention when we try to make sense of his theological achievement. For his closeness to Barth, however, he was often criticised. If at the beginning of his 'dialectical' period he would be less critical about Barth's theology of the Word of God, later he slightly changed his position under the pressure of ideas other theologians brought forward against Barth and consequently against him. He also simply ignored different issues about which he was enthusiastic earlier. As we already have seen, Tavaszy's theological conversions were never a loud 'repentance', but a slow shifting in emphasis. What Tavaszy stated about his allegiance to Calvin is more or less true, at least at the level of intentions. We shall

see the measure in which he managed to follow his intention as this study goes on by analysing the inter-relatedness of ideas in Tavaszy's doctrine of the Word of God.

a. The Need for a New Theological Program

A closer examination of the literature produced by Tavaszy in the period when his attention turned specifically to dialectical theology reveals that for Tavaszy the newly emerging dialectical theology responded to two basic needs of the theological enterprise. These are the need for a new theological program and a need for a new concept of the scientific. As we have seen in Chapter IV, Tavaszy hoped that dialectical theology would bring along a new reformation of the church. The condition for this new reformation to appear is a fresh approach to the doctrine of revelation. For Tavaszy this is *a new program in theology*.

As mentioned above, Tavaszy's first writing about dialectical theology was in 1923 when he reviewed the Barth-Harnack debate, especially Barth's reply to Harnack in the *Christliche Welt* (Tavaszy 1923b:69). From the fifteen questions addressed to Barth by Harnack, Tavaszy stressed those which refer to the necessity of historical-critical knowledge. Tavaszy thought that the charge of atheism and barbarism is justified against a culture if divine revelation is regarded as being utterly other than the manifestation of the ethical-spiritual culture. The issue of culture has always been a sensitive matter among Transylvanian theologians due to their liberal heritage and the minority situation where the church has been regarded as the safeguard of an oppressed culture.

For example Géza Nagy thought that dialectical theology has a strong anti-cultural character, and this is one of the two major hindrances in it that makes its acceptance difficult on a larger scale. The anti-cultural feature of dialectical theology, says Nagy, 'in Transylvania would be of certain danger, and let's add that it would be

strange from the spirit of Calvinism, too' (Nagy G 1995:180). Very early in the beginning of the reception of dialectical theology the issue of culture was raised. This fact demands a serious consideration of the possibilities of a theology of culture from the perspective of the theology of the Word based on Barth's thinking. Since in my opinion the issue of culture in theology is a major issue in the reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania I shall come back to this issue in the final chapter.

Tavaszy retains from Barth's responses to Harnack the main aspects of Barth's theology of the Word. Revelation – Tavaszy echoes Barth – can be grasped only through the Spirit that speaks to us in revelation: 'The God of revelation speaks to us and makes His way to our heart. He is the goal, content and even the way of revelation. The Word of God has priority' (Tavaszy 1923b:75). Revelation, says Tavaszy, must never become humanised and made one aspect of the many human discoveries. Barth, says Tavaszy, 'looks awe-struck at the majesty of God, in a way that is worthy of a Calvinist theologian' (Tavaszy 1923b:75). Referring to Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, Tavaszy makes a case for Barth's Calvinism since in his work 'every line is penetrated by a strong Calvinist tendency', and so Barth 'grasps Christianity in its pure form without any addition to its objective meaning' (Tavaszy 1923b:76). The reference to Calvin here is without further explanation about what is the 'objective meaning' of Christianity, and how Barth has achieved the above-mentioned grasp. From our treatment in the previous chapter about Barth's Calvinism we concluded that Barth expresses the majesty of God not in terms of predestination through God's sovereignty, but through the doctrine of the election of grace in Jesus Christ. Tavaszy, however, is not conscious of Barth's Christological weight in theological construction.

Tavaszy himself expresses his demand for a new program for theology in 1924 (Tavaszy 1924b:121). His argument is as follows. Although Protestant theology has already departed from the dominant concept of liberalism, in its scholarly approach, in

methods and even in goals, it is still on the liberal track. Tavaszy thinks that the demand, which needs to be made, is that theology should be more congruent with the practical life of the believer. This however does not mean giving up the historical and philosophical expressions of Christian faith, but the need to express the real 'life power' of it. Tavaszy says that

In Protestant theology we need a new program because we failed to express the reality of Christian religion and because we need to grasp it and express it in such a way in every discipline that its every line may breath the higher reality of Christian religion, in such a way that people either religiously or scholarly inclined may be attracted to it (Tavaszy 1924b:122).

Tavaszy appreciates the method of Karl Barth and Gogarten whom, building on Kierkegaard and Kutter, 'took Christianity deadly seriously'. They are prophetic spirits, says Tavaszy, since they encountered the 'reality of God with staggering power: not in the 'experience', not in the things and relationships of this relative world, but in God Himself, who is 'wholly other', the self-revealing God, who is not one of the realities of this world, but who is the only reality' (Tavaszy 1924b:124).

In Tavaszy's use of language we see that at this stage he is very much attracted to the practicality of religion in contrast to his earlier rationalist reflection about the religious phenomenon. The new program as he anticipated it, and as we have seen it before, needs to consider the encounter with God in which God reveals himself. Tavaszy's use of 'encounter' and 'experience', however, is not clear, which contains the seeds of a misunderstanding that bears its fruit later in the debate on dialectical theology in Transylvania. One of the objections brought against Barthian theology was that it condemned vehemently the religious experience that emerges from a purely human or

psychological experience without considering that the encounter with God is itself a 'human experience'.³

b. The Need for a New Concept of the 'Scientific'

The second impact of dialectical theology on Tavaszy was that he saw in it *a new concept of the 'scientific'*. This impact, like the previous one, is more connected with formal aspects of dialectical theology rather than with its content, but was perceived as being important for Tavaszy's systematic mind. For him the scientific character of theology was always an important issue (see works 1923c, 1925a, 1928a, 1947 among others). As one immersed in the philosophical reflections of his time, faith needed a systematic presentation and an explanation of how it related to other areas of knowledge. Placing philosophy of religion, and later theology, in the system of other disciplines played an apologetic role.

After the emerging dialectical theology had challenged the basic assumptions of liberal theology the place formerly given to theology in the system of disciplines became uncertain. Previously, it seemed to Tavaszy, that the neo-Kantian school secured a final place for theology. But the price to pay was too big: it was not only that the neo-Kantian school could not articulate the specific character of Christian theology, but its immanent and relative conception of revelation tended to quench the spirit of the Gospel in the Church. In his study *The System of Scientific Disciplines* (1925a) Tavaszy reviews several attempts to systematise scientific disciplines, and finds that of Paul Tillich⁴ the most appealing when Barth already dissociated himself from Tillich in 1923 due to a dispute on the nature of revelation (Busch 1976:152).

³ Géza Nagy (1995:179) for example charged dialectical theology because it 'suppressed personal knowledge of God and that of individual character of faith-conviction'.

⁴ Tillich's work to which Sándor Tavaszy makes reference is *Das System der Wissenschaften nach Gegenständen und Method.*

In the classification of scientific disciplines Tillich suggested a start from the principle that in the activity leading to knowledge there are two elements: *thought* and *being*. According to the way the relationship between thought and being is conceived there are three groups of disciplines: a) the *disciplines of thought*, by which being is conceived as manifested in thought, b) *disciplines of being*, by which being is conceived as contradicting thought and c) *disciplines of the spirit* (szellemtudományok), by which thought is conceived as being itself. In the process of knowing there can be two approaches: *autonomous* and *theonomous*. In the autonomous approach the spiritual act uses its own forms to grasp meaning; according to the theonomous approach, meaning is attained through the grounding of the spiritual act in being itself, and not in the form of the spiritual act. This distinction made possible for Tillich, and for Tavaszy, to make a differentiation between philosophy of religion and theology, between culture and religion.

The theonomous approach is represented by *religion*, the autonomous by *culture*. Between these two trends and their exponents there is an ongoing conflict. The origin of this conflict is in the fact that theonomy sanctifies and validates forms which contradict the perceiving consciousness, while autonomy draws into the sphere of the rational the symbols of the Unconditioned and tries to rationalise them at all costs. Thus theonomy becomes heteronomy: and makes religion an independent function, by means of which it violently suppresses the others, while autonomy becomes profane: it creates the non-religious form of culture (Tavaszy 1925b:25).

Thus Tavaszy has found a new theoretical framework to justify the scientific character of theology, both pursuing the newly discovered road of irrationalism and also retaining a positive view of the relation of culture to theology.

[T]he requirement for scientific character does not rest exclusively in rationality, at least in the case of the disciplines of the spirit, but it is the *sine qua non* of the acquirement of that spirituality which makes up the object of the disciplines of the spirit in question... Applying this to theology we can say that the understanding of religion, and especially of Christianity, does not consist first of all in the actual researched historical and philosophical data (Tavaszy 1925b:28).

Hungarian theology in the second half of the nineteenth century conformed to the approach of the positivistic scientific view, observes Tavaszy. Theology was forced to agree with general knowledge established by science and its task was determined as to 'make scientific theory and religious views agree'. In this view of theology there was no place for miracles (Tavaszy 1931b:23-4). Dialectical theology, Tavaszy explained in 1931, brought a revision of the concept of 'scientific' in theology. This theology does not work with the concept of science characteristic of natural sciences and rejects the definition of science according to which science is 'the system of justified knowledge related to a certain kind of ascertained facts'. Tavaszy articulated Barth's concept of the scientific character of theology by saying that 'the logically sound science-concept requires that each discipline must proceed according to the nature of its object, so it is not possible to force a general concept of science on every discipline' (Tavaszy 1931b:26). The field of theological science is not the same as with other disciplines, but it has a special area defined by the proclamation of the word of God. Theology cannot make a 'splendid isolation' in the economy of scientific disciplines, 'but it has to learn to obey its own procedure in its own house' (Tavaszy 1931b:26).

4. Conclusion

We have seen in this section that in the period when Sándor Tavaszy came under the influence of dialectical theology he was already turning away from his former theological and philosophical position based on philosophy of religion. Under the impulse of German dialectical theologians, he felt the need of a new program. By a new program he understood an entirely new theological orientation since his favourite theological school, study of religion, was in crisis. This crisis incentive, as for Barth, Gogarten, Brunner and others was important in launching his search for the Word of God.

As Tavaszy realised, the key problem of liberalism was the conception of revelation as an immanent phenomenon. He consequently turned to the notion of the Word of God as a transcendental entity, which is also the life and the real presence of God. He accepted quite early the idea of the encounter with God, as the 'place' of revelation where the Word of God can be heard, but his notion of the encounter was not clearly defined. This can be seen in the fact that while he promoted a theology of the Word of God, he was not able to appreciate the existing phenomenon of 'encounter' in his own church that the evangelical trend wanted to propagate (on this issue see Tavaszy 1925a:173ff.).

In his so-called 'transition period' he already maintained the basic tenets of dialectical theology such as the wholly otherness of God, the actuality of revelation and that of the Word of God, the sinfulness of man. These ideas were not simply taken over like slogans, but were discovered in personal reflections by drawing conclusions from basic principles.

I also pointed out that for Tavaszy the epistemological question was very important. Having a systematic mind he could not leave philosophy of religion without finding a new epistemological basis for his new theological position. As we have seen in the previous section he turned to Tillich's ideas, which were attractive, since they also contained an existential element. This epistemology might have been responsible for turning his attention to Kierkegaard's existentialism that he embraced in the 1930s and which in Tavaszy's development, according to Tamás Juhász, 'can be seen as the last station in the full reception of Barthian theology' (Juhász T 1988:512. see VI.C.2).

B. 'Under the Predicament of Revelation' – The Word of God in Sándor Tavaszy's Theology

After methodological and formal issues we turn our attention to the material aspects of Sándor Tavaszy's theology. For Tavaszy the basic issue for theology became to place all its questions and answers under the predicament of revelation. In the preface to the collection of essays *Under the Predicament of Revelation* (1929d), he sums up his program:

to believe, think and teach *under the predicament of revelation*, this is the way in which theology that became anthropology can become theology again ... To conquer the anthropology that dominated theological thinking and make theology to be *theology* indeed, this is the tendency and this is the program which penetrates my essays (Tavaszy 1929d:3).

Tavaszy did not follow Karl Barth in all aspects of his theology, but he did get an incentive from Barth to apply in his theology what Barth had taught him. The main idea he gleaned from Barth was to start from the revelation of the Word of God and make it a principle on which the whole theological system depends. By the mere application of this principle Tavaszy's theology did not become Barthian, but its application was enough to shape a theology which in certain aspects is closer to Calvin than to Barth.

1. Reviews of Tavaszy's *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*

In dealing with Tavaszy's theology first I refer to some of his articles, written mainly between 1929 and 1931, and then I shall consider his *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*, published in 1932, and try to observe any development that might have occurred. In the *Dogmatics* we find Tavaszy's most developed theological thinking and the highest level he reached in the reception of Barth's theology of the Word of God and in making use of the principle of the Word of God in developing a coherent theological system. It is

important to note that Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* reflects the most systematic exposition of dialectical theology ever achieved by a Transylvanian theologian.

The theological and literary activity of Sándor Tavaszy from the mid 1930s was narrowing down. Apart from two or three major essays his literary activity was not important from a theological point of view. The position Tavaszy held in church administration and the emergence of the Communist regime is partly to be blamed for this situation. When in 1936 János Vásárhelyi became bishop in the Transylvanian Church District, Tavaszy was elected vice bishop (főjegyző), thus becoming the second in the leadership hierarchy of the church. He turned his attention towards church administration and church life issues. On the academic level, a four-year professorship in philosophy at the university in Kolozsvár provided a short-lived boost. From this period we have his lectures entitled *Introduction to Philosophy*. The lectures were published in 1999, by Márton Tonk in *Tavaszy Sándor, Válogatott filozófiai írások* [Selected Philosophical Writings] (see Tavaszy 1999) and deal with the same issues as *Mi a filozófia?* [What is Philosophy], published in 1928 (see Tavaszy 1928c).

The Communists dismissed him from his chair in 1948. In this year he also ended his literary activities and after a three-year-long illness he died in 1951. Tavaszy's writings in this period are mostly about church life and ministry issues. The total percentage of theological and philosophical writings is 6.2 per cent of all the amount of literary production, and the amount of writings that in one way or another relate to the life, tradition and social context of the church is 76.6 per cent. These figures alone show where Tavaszy's main focus lay in the last period of his life.⁵

⁵ See Table 3 in the Appendices about the topical distribution of Tavaszy's work in this period.

The importance of his *Dogmatics* is reflected in the reaction of his contemporaries. They acclaimed it as a work of watershed importance, though the reaction to it was diverse.

István Török contrasted Tavaszy's theological activity with that of László Ravasz (Török 1933). Török considered that Ravasz was a representative of cultural Protestantism based on critical idealism and which 'showed to modern man what is the place of religion in human life and culture' (Török 1933:142). Contrary to Ravasz, Tavaszy looked for the meaning of life and culture in the sphere of revelation, said Török. Ravasz started 'from below', Tavaszy 'from above'. The merit of the method 'from above' rests in the possibility of validating God's Word over against what belongs to the world. The 'from below' method involves the danger of mixing the Word of God with human thought, says Török (1933:142). He does not mention anything about dialectical theology. The reason why he regarded Tavaszy's theology having a strong reformation character was due to the fact that in Transylvania dialectical theology came to be regarded as a new manifestation of reformation. This, however, does not mean that Tavaszy's position on dialectical theology came to be largely accepted, but certainly the opinion that somehow dialectical theology is linked with the reformation of the church became popular. Tavaszy is a watchman, said Török, taking care that 'in various activities of the church of God the Word of God be proclaimed and operative purely and without being mixed up with human additions' (Török 1933:143).

Bishop Sándor Makkai reviewed Tavaszy's work from the vantage-point of his personal position, namely that dialectical theology brings nothing new to the Transylvanian theological scene (see section IV. B.). Makkai thinks that what makes Tavaszy's theology valuable is that it fortifies the Reformed consciousness and focuses on the theology of the Word. Although having a different view on the role of dialectical theology in Transylvania, Makkai aims to agree with Tavaszy in having the same

mission in the church, namely making the Hungarian Reformed community in Transylvania 'self-conscious' of its rich heritage as Calvinist Christians. Tavaszy fulfilled this mission by 'dipping from the spring' of dialectical theology. But, in Makkai's view, their common mission did not start with the appearance of dialectical theology. 'The responsible factors of the church [officials], the pastors – said Makkai – 'had left behind for some good years those viewpoints that had hindered the development of self-consciousness' (Makkai 1932:163). Undoubtedly Makkai was referring to the clash of liberal theology and confessional Calvinism in the first half of the century, when 'theological thinking was inappropriate to create a dogmatics, since in it the speculative, philosophical, historical and psychological aspects were dominant' (Makkai 1932:164). But in Tavaszy's dogmatics, said Makkai, theology answers the questions that have been raised in the only way 'it is permitted to be done today'. Makkai finds that Tavaszy's work is penetrated by the fundamental pursuit of 'seeing and making to be seen all the questions in the light of the Word and revelation'. Dialectical theology acquired this way of looking at things by pondering the general human crisis, and with this mandate it came to Transylvania, but this 'will not change the fact', said Makkai, 'that among us the recognition of the crisis has begun earlier, respectively independently of it'. Makkai concludes that 'the theological concept that vitalises Tavaszy's dogmatics, basically is linked with the theology of the reformers, and in its setting out of problems it conforms to today's search' (Makkai 1932:163f.).

The review that Gyula Dávid made (1933) endorses dialectical theology and its influence on Tavaszy's thinking. In his review of Tavaszy's book he briefly presents the content of each doctrine giving his ideas here and there vis-à-vis Tavaszy's position. One idea runs through Dávid's argument like a red thread: Tavaszy's dogmatics is a reinforcement and revitalisation of reformation theology (Dávid 1933:33). Tavaszy brings a new dogmatic concept in theology, but this 'novelty does not mean the

intrusion of some modern fashionable theological spirit, but the coming into force of the truest reformation spirit and thinking, making way for itself through dialectical theology' (Dávid 1933:28). Dávid thinks that Tavaszy relies so heavily on the confessions and on Calvin that he 'rejects even Brunner's teaching'. Dávid himself seems to prefer Brunner over against Barth.

Thus in the perception of Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* dialectical theology did not play a major role. The unanimous opinion was that Tavaszy's work has a central reformation character and the impact of dialectical theology was seen only as a marginal influence. Reviews of Tavaszy's work thus confirm our thesis that Tavaszy, in fact, was not a transmitter of Barth's theological system, but a theologian who made a fruitful use of Barth's theology of the Word of God in reviving a conservative Calvinist position.

For the purpose of this study it is not necessary to review the content of Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* in detail,⁶ but I want to make some general observations.

(i.) Tavaszy quoted mostly German theologians, among whom Karl Barth and Emil Brunner occupy the most important place. Looking to the footnotes of the 290 pages of *Dogmatics* we find that the references to theologians are as follows: He quotes Barth 41 times, Calvin 35 times (more than 30 times from the *Institutes*), and Emil Brunner 13 times. Liberal theologians, to whom Tavaszy himself once belonged, now have no important role in his theology. It seems that at the time of the writing, he has definitely moved away from his former theological position. At the same time we realise that Tavaszy's reception of Karl Barth was restricted mainly to Barth's *Christlichen Dogmatik* and to *Der Römerbrief*, which is understandable considering the timetable of Barth's publications.⁷ In his essays, however, Tavaszy's main source,

⁶ For an overview of the *Dogmatics*' content see Table 3 in the Appendices.

⁷ Tavaszy's *Christian Reformed Dogmatics* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics* were both published in 1932. Tavaszy wrote his without knowing the content of Barth's work.

besides the *Dogmatik*, was *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. As a consequence of this Barth's teaching is reflected mostly in the prolegomena part of Tavaszy's dogmatics, especially in the doctrine of revelation.

(ii.) Tavaszy was drawing very much from Calvin and the confessions of the Reformed church. In certain areas he exposes pure Calvinist teaching, based solely on the confessions and on Calvin's theology. It seems that these sources were his final authorities.

(iii.) A final observation is linked with the use of dialectical method itself. Tavaszy presented the dialectical method in his essays (see Tavaszy 1929a, 1931b and 1932c:22-27), but he did not use it consequently in his dogmatics. Yet the content of German dialectical theology, especially that of Barth, is certainly present in Tavaszy's thinking. He also talked about pairs in contradiction such as God-man, grace-nature, holy God-sinner, but dialectics did not become his theological method.

2. The Word of God in Major Aspects of Tavaszy's Theology

From our analysis of Tavaszy's work we may discover some Barthian influence on different Christian doctrines formulated by Tavaszy. The influence is mainly in the area of prolegomena to dogmatics, especially in the doctrine of revelation. In what follows I intend to give special attention to those doctrines that in some way are related to this prolegomena, and in this way to the doctrine of the Word of God through which the issues of revelation are expressed.

a. The Revelation of the Word of God

In the theology of Sándor Tavaszy the eschatological character of the Word of God is the most prominent feature because he closely followed Barth's early understanding in working out the dialectic between God and man and the necessity of revelation. Tavaszy

considers that it is an illusion to think that man can make a better world on his own strength and initiative (Tavaszy 1932b:51). He learned from Barth that God is entirely other in relating to man and only 'preachy arrogance or dallying pietism can think about owning God' (Tavaszy 1931d:271), as liberalism, both in its psychological and romantic form did. 'There is no continuity between God and his absolute world; between the two neither evolution nor progress can make a bridge, but God's revealing will breaks through the differences between them and reconciles the antagonism, by the fact that through revelation he appears in the world' – says Tavaszy in full concordance with Barthian thought (Tavaszy 1929d:40). Since man cannot talk about God, and consequently theology cannot talk about God either, man needs to let God talk about himself. This is for Tavaszy the transcendental character of revelation. Tavaszy does not use the expression Barth used about revelation touching the human realm like a 'tangent touches the circle, that is does not touch it all' (ER II:30), but he maintained the same dialectic when he said: 'revelation in all its aspects contradicts human thinking, consequently man can talk about it only in terms of contradicting thought and words, between the reality of which there is always a qualitative and not a quantitative difference' (Tavaszy 1929a:28). Tavaszy does not sharpen the antagonism between revelation and history as much as the early Barth did but nevertheless he thinks that revelation and history are incommensurable categories:

God cannot be known from history, since history is the tangle of human manifestations, but nevertheless he is known in history, because God does not speak his Word in a void, but in the tangle of human history. He cannot be known from nature, for nature is only the reflection of his glory... but we do not have eyes to capture this reflection' (Tavaszy 1936b:127).

In this mingled sentence of Barth's and Calvin's ideas we see the 'vertical divine manifestation' (Barth) together with God's manifestation in nature with man's incapacity of realising it (Calvin). The revealing act of God in history took place in the

‘primary history’ of Jesus Christ (here Tavaszy echoes Barth), which happened ‘between the times’ like the ‘eternal appearing in time giving meaning to history and determining its sense.’ What made this history different was what appeared in temporal condition: the event of primary history, namely revelation. Tavaszy concludes: ‘Revelation is not in history, because revelation is other than history; history cannot be the bearer of revelation, but revelation is on the border of history and primary history’ (Tavaszy 1929a:35). Tavaszy’s position on the relations between history and revelation presented in his early essays remain unaltered in the *Dogmatics* and maintains the characteristic of Barthian dialectics.

Tavaszy follows Barth in defining two other characteristics of revelation, which actually derive from the specific view of the relation between revelation and history: (1) God is hidden, even in his revelation, and (2) God reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is altogether in his revelation, since there is no other revealer apart from the self-revealing God. It is not possible to speak about God in quantitative terms. Tavaszy says that Barth does not consider the Trinity to be a speculative term. Trinity refers to the way God reveals himself (Tavaszy 1929b:19). Thinking of God in terms of only one of his modes of existence would mean objectifying him, which would result in us being lord over God. Tavaszy thinks that due to the nature of revelation our knowledge of God is dialectical in nature. God, even in his revelation remains entirely hidden: ‘There is only one way of knowing God: to be known by God’ (Tavaszy 1929b:19). This ‘being known by God’ is realised in the event of the Word of God. God through his Word resounding to us in revelation talks to us in such a way that he shines his light in us but at the same time transforms us. The Word of God is not simply a speech, but a transforming act. Since God in his wholeness is present in the transforming act of revelation, the Holy Spirit is the one who realises the subjective possibility of revelation (Tavaszy 1932c:76). So, Tavaszy follows Barth closely in

denying any subjective possibility for revelation inherent to human nature. The big miracle of 'man becoming God's, in and through God', is achieved through the Holy Spirit. The miracle of the outpouring of the Spirit makes the personal, subjective Christian life possible, the subject of which is always the Holy Spirit (Tavaszy 1932c:214).

Drawing from Barth's theology Tavaszy considers that '*revelation and faith are correlative concepts*. There is no revelation for us without faith and faith without revelation would be nonsense and non-existent' – Tavaszy says (1929d:46). God gives faith to man in a similar way in which he gives his revelation: according to his good-pleasure. Here is Tavaszy's definition of faith:

Faith is an *endowment* by God to break through the layers of the earthly-human-psychological and given processes of the natural world and to reach into freedom and victory in revelation. As God in revelation makes his way into the human heart, in the same way through the power given in faith man breaks his way into God's majestic will and fatherly heart (Tavaszy 1929d:46f.).

In 1932 in his *Dogmatics* Tavaszy revisits the concept of faith and he puts right expressions like 'endowment', and 'man breaks his way to God'. These expressions might make somebody think that partaking in revelation brings a permanent constitutional change of human nature. Tavaszy does not affirm this idea since in his essays he is more interested in the origin of faith than in the actual nature of it. The last chapter of his *Dogmatics* is about faith as the 'last headstone of the marvellous building of dogmatics' (Tavaszy 1932c:271). In Tavaszy's building of dogmatics the chamber of faith is a Calvinistic structure. The discussion of faith 'should follow the doctrine of predestination, because according to Calvin, the mother of faith is election since there is no faith for the damned' (Tavaszy 1932c:271). He builds on the idea that faith is the response to revelation created by the Holy Spirit and is not a human-historical phenomenon. By the lesson learnt from the nature of dialectical theology Tavaszy warns

that although faith is manifested through the functions of the human spirit, nevertheless it is not identical with any of them. He uses Peter Brunner's interpretation of Calvin when he denies from faith any subjective power in itself. Peter Brunner and Tavaszy even attribute a certain dialectical thinking to Calvin when they think that Calvin spoke in paradoxes because his theological method would not permit him to make direct statements about faith: 'Consequently he spoke indirectly to allude to what is not expressible through direct speech' (cited in Tavaszy 1932c:275).⁸ Making a step further from his essays in direction of clarifying the nature of faith Tavaszy says in his *Dogmatics*:

Faith... differs from every kind of inwardness by the fact that the 'in-ness' contained in it is a new subject: God himself. If the subject of faith is God himself, then as a matter-of-course the faith-created inner happening, movement or act is entirely different from the psychical processes appearing in parallel with it (Tavaszy 1932c:275).

In the doctrine of the Word of God in revelation Tavaszy thus follows the direction laid down by dialectical theology, especially that of the early Barth.

b. The Word of God in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ

In his exposition of Christology Tavaszy draws heavily on Barth in formal questions, what we might call the 'clearing of ground for Christology'. In the actual content of the doctrine, however, he follows a traditional Calvinistic theological line arguing from the confessions and from the *Institutes*.

A specific Barthian approach is to give a Christological basis for the possibility of revelation, and consequently of theology. Tavaszy thinks that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is *the problem* [central issue] of dialectical theology, since Christology is the point of concurrence of different theological questions (Tavaszy 1929a:31). From the

⁸ Barth quotes Peter Brunner, *Vom Glaube bei Calvin*. Tübingen, 1925. Einleitung.

concept of God's self-revelation Tavaszy follows Barth to say that only God can reveal God, neither an exalted man, nor an intermediate being descended from above: 'God cannot be revealed by any "Almost-God", since *finitum non capax infiniti*' (1929b:56). The rediscovery of this Calvinist principle was aided by Barth and became the basic principle for Tavaszy in articulating the content of Christology. The *finitum non capax infiniti* and the *extra calvinisticum* principles, according to Tavaszy, keep theology on the Chalcedonian track. The Lutheran *finitum est capax infiniti* principles led to the *communicatio idiomatum* and implicitly to the concept of God-man; the omnipresence of Christ's human nature (Tavaszy 1932c:171). Tavaszy, however, did not realise that the 'extra calvinisticum' principle is not entirely compatible with Barth's thinking, since the Logos being present at the same time in Jesus Christ and in the presence of the Father outside Christ is in conflict with Barth's idea of God's full commitment to the world in his eternal decree. At the same time the 'idea of a double existence of Christ as Logos and as Man' would 'lead to Docetism or to Ebionitism' (CD 1.2:163). This seemingly unimportant remark has never been corrected by Tavaszy, indicating the fact that he might have been more interested to link Barth, and the influence gained through him to an orthodox form of Protestant Christianity than to be faithful to Barth's own ideas.

Tavaszy discussed two major aspects of Christology, namely its ground and its content.

(i.) As far as *clearing the ground for Christology* is concerned Tavaszy maintained with Barth and Gogarten that: 'Revelation is possible only if the impossible becomes possible, namely that God steps into the finite, that he becomes a limited phenomenon in a limited world, if God (*horribile dictu*) becomes man' (Tavaszy 1929d:9). This teaching, affirmed Tavaszy, is crucial since without it theology would cease to be theology.

Through the incarnation of Christ, the Word was manifested as a personal reality. The revelation of God as the Word of God can be equated with the incarnation of Christ, 'since God in revelation makes himself known not in the form of material reality, not as an *object*, but as a Thou, since revelation is not an *intimation* (signification), but a personal encounter' (Tavaszy 1932c:165). The conception of the Word of God as an encounter, characteristic of dialectical theology, is present in Tavaszy's theology, too. It is this encounter that matters; the words and deeds of Jesus Christ are the vehicles for this encounter.

Tavaszy shares Barth's preoccupation with the question of the relationship of history and revelation. Tavaszy thinks that dialectical theology, as the new transcendental theology, shares the pursuit of Calvinist theology to dissociate the finite and the infinite. In both systems there is an undeniable separation between God and the world, God and man, between the eternal and temporal existence. According to Tavaszy, the message that this dualism cannot be undermined was the essential part of the Gospel in all ages. Only Jesus Christ overcomes the primary dualism between God and the world. He quotes Barth's *Romans* about Jesus Christ being the cross-point of the planes of temporality and eternity. Christ cannot be known outside of this cross-point, since from the perspective of the temporal plane his person is only a 'problem', a 'myth' (Tavaszy 1932c:159). Tavaszy, like the early Barth, reduces the cross-point of history and the eternal to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and concentrates the revelation of God in this very moment. In the moment of revelation Tavaszy opens up the horizon of God's redemptive activity, making reference to both Barth and Calvin. 'The undefeatable and eternal God', says Tavaszy, 'revealed himself in the resurrected Christ. Christ swallowed up death, therefore he is the life; he defeated sin, therefore he himself is the truth'. Tavaszy argues that 'for Reformation theology, Christ is prevalent not as the historical Jesus, but as Logos-Christ, as the creator and redeemer of the

world, therefore as the victorious, risen, reigning, majestic Lord-Christ, manifested in the historical Jesus' (Tavaszy 1929d:26-27).

The historical Jesus research, Tavaszy thinks, 'demonstrated that the knowledge of the historical Jesus produced results that are not appropriate to increase the faith and trust towards Jesus Christ in the hearts of those who have such knowledge' (Tavaszy 1932c:157). The reason for this negative attitude resides in Tavaszy's conviction about the nature of historical investigation: history is made up by the 'influence-plaiting' of the human spirit, and the knowledge of history leads in fact to the knowledge of the human spirit. For this reason history cannot be the source of faith, hence Tavaszy welcomes the appearance of transcendental theology (Tavaszy 1932c:158). He closes the treatment of the role of history in Christology with the conclusion drawn from Barth: 'In the knowledge of Jesus Christ faith is to lead history and not vice versa, in which case faith either remains an unsolved problem, or will turn into a myth' (Tavaszy 1932c:159. Cf ER II:6).

(ii.) In his *Dogmatics*, Tavaszy has a detailed treatment of the *content* of Christology. In certain areas he followed Barth and Brunner, but his theological foundation was Calvin and the confessions. The treatment of the topic of the two natures of Christ and the comprehension of their relationship has a clearly Barthian overtone. Tavaszy accepted the thesis of the confessions: Jesus Christ is God and man in one person. After he repudiates positions traditionally called heretical, he follows Barth in justifying the virgin birth. Tavaszy regards parthenogenesis, contrary to Brunner's position⁹, as always having had an important role in the Christian message since the divinity of Christ and his miraculous birth are inseparable. Its importance

⁹ Tavaszy reads Brunner's opinion on the virgin birth, as being just a 'theory' having no importance in the Christological struggles Cf Brunner, *Der Mittle*, p. 289.

resides in the fact that by 'conceptus de Spiritu sancto, natus ex Maria virgine' the church confessed that Christ in his incarnation 'broke the continuity... that existed between Adam and his descendants' (an important teaching of dialectical theology), and so he became the new man, the second Adam (Tavaszy 1932c:166-167). Tavaszy, however, cannot rehearse Barth's full position on this matter which has become known later. Barth thought of the virgin birth as the breaking of the continuity, and conceived it as a new act of God in Christ, but not as the breaking of the chain of original sin. The importance of the virgin birth for Barth is not in establishing the divinity of Jesus Christ, but rather is the sign of this new act of God in history for the salvation of mankind (GD:164).

Considering the nature of this second Adam, the only significant distinctness from the theology of Calvin and the confession is that Tavaszy adopts Barth's insight to emphasise the divine nature of Christ: *His divinity is the subject of his humanity*. 'The two natures in Christ' says Tavaszy, 'do not stand alongside each other like two co-ordinate factors... Christ's human nature was not like his divine nature, but the predicate, the means, the organ or even the medium of his divine nature' (Tavaszy 1932c:170). This emphasis which is already present in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* will lead Barth to affirm the medieval Christology called *enhypostatic* (CD I.2:162), but Tavaszy will not follow this development. For him the emphasis on the priority of the divine nature is derived from the reformation principles of 'finitum non est capax infiniti', and is a direct consequence of it. By this consideration Tavaszy is back on the soil of the confessions and that of Calvin's theology and from this ground he develops further his theology.

c. The Word of God and the Canon

Tavaszy, even from an early stage adopted Barth's view of Scripture. When he surveyed Barth's *Die christliche Dogmatik* in 1929 he just mentioned that Barth's basic understanding was that Scripture is a witness of revelation: 'in the Scripture God's Word is addressed to us, not directly, but indirectly through the indirect testimony of the prophets and apostles' (Tavaszy 1929b:120). That the locus of the Word of God for us is in the Scripture becomes the basis for the knowledge of God, since man should look for God where he reveals himself. The unilateral standpoints of both liberalism and orthodoxy had provoked a crisis in theology, out of which only a balanced consideration of the human and divine aspects of the Bible could issue.

Tavaszy, as a result of the shift in his thinking, considered that from the two aspects of Scripture the divine is the more important. He says that 'in the knowing of revelation of God the detailed knowledge of human relations is less important, since the human spirits as the organs of revelation are not to be considered in their human capacity, but as the witnesses of the Holy Spirit' (Tavaszy 1929d:24). This is how Tavaszy arrives at Calvin and his doctrine about the testimony of the Spirit. In the relation of God and Scripture, God is to be considered as the unconditional condition of scripture. Considering the nature of Scripture, Tavaszy makes a programmatic statement that indicates his break with his liberal past:

We need to turn about our entire religious thinking, we need to revise radically our theology, and we need to end the anthropological approach that dominates it... we need to vindicate a clear-cut theocentric approach, which would make it impossible to turn God into a servant of man, would exclude looking to the work of Christ from the point of view of human interests, and would prevent us regarding the Scripture otherwise than as essentially a divine document of redemption (Tavaszy 1929d:25).

Tavaszy echoes dialectical theology in excluding (at least in practice) other places than the Canon where God might talk to us: 'since it pleased God to talk to us in a certain place, this is why it was needed to wall up the place by the Canon' (Tavaszy

1929a:21). When the priority of the Word of God is taken seriously, said Tavaszy, one will not be perturbed by the historical formation of the Canon that was born out of historical-human circumstances in the midst of struggles between parties and heated arguments. The church neither created, nor authenticated the Canon, wrote Tavaszy, but 'the Canon authenticates the church, since these human activities will not overthrow the primacy of the Word' (Tavaszy 1932c:85). The church recognised that it was only in the confined place of the Canon that the Word of God resounded. Tavaszy emphasised that the idea of the church putting its own stamp alongside God's on the record of revelation is present even in the writings of Calvin (Tavaszy 1932c:85, Cf Institutes I.vii.2).

The authority of the Scripture for Tavaszy, as for Barth himself, is expressed by the Calvinist doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. 'The internal and hidden testimony of God the Holy Spirit is not a certainty because it conforms to certain rational proofs, but because only the Holy Spirit is able to seal the credibility of the Scripture' (Tavaszy 1932c:87 and 1929d:24). Tavaszy makes a step further beyond Calvin and towards the theology of Karl Barth and conceives the testimony of the Spirit as an event: 'the Word sounding in the Scripture is never *praeteritum*, or *perfectum*, but always present, an eternal present' (Tavaszy 1932c:86). Nobody can point to a certain biblical passage and say; this is the Word of God, since the recognition of the Word is always the gift of God the Holy Spirit. Tavaszy confessed with Barth that 'Scripture only *in actu*, only in the form of talking, testifying, addressing becomes the Word; otherwise it is nothing else than a book belonging to the range of classical religious documents'. The Word resounding in the Scripture is not a thought-process, but a miracle that 'happens before the eyes of the believer in the moment of God's presence' (Tavaszy 1932c:90). In order that this miracle may happen the condition of preaching the word in the church is to be fulfilled. Faith is not a condition for hearing the Word,

but the consequence of it: 'faith and obedience are the result of our hearing the Word, that we are one in the fellowship of the Spirit' (Tavaszy 1936b:128).

d. The Word of God and the Confessions of the Church

In the exposition of the nature and role of confessions we can see Tavaszy's attempt to bring together dialectical theology, the theology of Calvin and the teaching of confessions.¹⁰

Tavaszy considered Confessional Calvinism being a positive development: 'we attained a situation where the Reformed confessions are not unknown any more, but became the pillars of personal strength for our Christian life and thought' (Tavaszy 1935c:204). The vindication of confessions for the Reformed church, however, does not mean for Tavaszy that the church excludes itself from any fresh testimony of the Holy Spirit, but rather recognises that the confessions have human-historical and subjective aspects. They are formulations of the faith of the church in its classical periods, and consequently the creation of a confession is not a permanent activity of the church, like the theological task, but it is a periodical task. 'The confessions are authoritative, but periodical, classical and collective theology for a church community' (Tavaszy 1932c:20). This for Tavaszy and for Barth indeed, meant that the revision of the confessions is possible, since Reformed confessions 'live in the act of a permanent renewing knowledge' (Tavaszy 1929c:22).¹¹ The confessions are relevant, says Tavaszy, since they do not know any other truth than the criterion of the Word of God and express perfectly the Reformed spirituality (Tavaszy 1929d:65).

¹⁰ By 'confessions', Tavaszy meant the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession. In his 1929 essay 'Under the Predicament of Revelation', he dealt only with the Heidelberg Confession, which he considered 'the most precious biblical fruit of Reformation', but in his *Dogmatics* he treats both confessions as equally important.

¹¹ Reference is made to *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1925. Heft 4.

Tavaszy seemed to find that the Heidelberg Catechism has the same dialectical structure as dialectical theology itself, which in fact, said Tavaszy, is the ‘inner dialectic of reformed Christian life itself’. His argument sounds like that of one who has learned the dialectic of God and man from dialectical theology: ‘Without the desperate knowledge of permanent human misery redemption is meaningless, without the liberating power of redemption there is no knowledge about the extent of our misery, and what is the thankfulness of Calvinist activism is known only by the redeemed-miserable, consoled-desperate and saved-sinner’ (Tavaszy 1929d:65). Tavaszy interprets the Reformed characteristics of confessions in such a way that we can recognise in them the basic features of dialectical theology as well. These characteristics listed by Tavaszy are: *theocentrism* (manifested in the fact that salvation is ascribed to the grace of God alone), and *the primacy of God’s grace* (before man could do anything, God acts). The confessions protect with jealousy the autonomy of divine grace vis-à-vis human will and acts. According to Tavaszy from the confessions we can see that:

even the converted and justified man lives continuously under God’s grace and power, thus he is always a beginner, always feeble. The holy life, seen from the human perspective, has no continuity, but it is fragmented and marked with truncations. *Christian life is as dialectical in nature as Christian thinking is* (Tavaszy 1929d:74).

The confessions can be the source of dogmatics since in them ‘the Word is sounding out to us’, but at the same time they guide our orientation in hearing the Word of God in the endless world of the Scripture. Quoting Barth, Tavaszy said: ‘The confessions are classical and standard commentaries on the scripture. Commentary in the sense that they take their strength from no other source than the scripture, and they have as much power, as their source in the Scripture gives to them’ (Tavaszy 1932c:20). Indeed, for Barth, the confessions are a kind of proclamation of the church based on the Word of God in the Scripture (GD:239ff.).

e. The Word of God and the Task of Theology

Tavaszy promoted dialectical theology as the theology of the Word. In his inaugural speech of the new academic year in 1928, he tried to hold together scientific theology and Christian spirituality. 'Scientific theological work does not stand outside of the Word of God and from the devotion that it nourishes', he said, 'because our scholarly theological work without the Word of God is a nonsense. The Word of God without prayer is a closed door at which we knock in vain, because it does not open up for us'. Such a theology is needed in the Reformed church, which is the 'church of the Word' and the 'church of prayer' (Tavaszy 1928a:213).

Although each era has its own theological trend, each theological trend is bound to return to that primary foundation from which the theological process took off: the revelation in Jesus Christ. Theology has a place in the church 'if theology cherishes with greater dedication the Word of God contained in the only authentic Scripture, as the absolute testifying authority about the eternal divine revelation' (Tavaszy 1928a:215). Tavaszy follows Barth in defining dogma as the object of dogmatics, and its material being the dogmas. Dogma as 'the absolute truth and eternal Word' can be the object of dogmatics only indirectly through dogmas, which are the temporal expression of dogma, the material of the theologising of the church. Tavaszy recognises that dogmas do not conform perfectly to dogma, since they share the huge misery of the earthly human being.

The task of theology therefore is related to revelation and the Word of God. It has to stand by its source (Word of God) and 'follow its river-bed, to be a continuous warning to the church, to be an SOS cry, that the church aided by its academic theology may revise what it proclaims, teaches and does' (Tavaszy 1928a:215). Tavaszy, following Barth, gives a *prophetic guardian role* for theology in the life of the church. 'Theology should always look upwards', said Tavaszy, 'while the church struggles with

healing the misery of human living, it should always enkindle the fire on the altar of the church, to prevent it turning into a stuffy crypt' (Tavaszy 1928a:215). Theology accomplishes this role with difficulty due to the resistance of the church and due to the fact that even theology itself tends to 'cling to the sinful world'. But nevertheless theology should be before the church and let the Word be lord over it in order that in the mind of the church 'God's light coming from the face of Christ may shine' (Tavaszy 1928a:215).

This role of prophetic guardian can be fulfilled only if theology itself becomes preaching in the robe of scientific thought:¹² *theology is the preaching of the Word in the form of logical concepts*. He is entirely in tune with Barth when he says: 'Dogmatics is not called to shed light on what one should believe, or to harmonise the teaching of faith with human thinking, but it is called to submit to the truth of the Word of God in scientific form on the basis of preaching, dogma and dogmas, with the aim that the proclamation of the Word of God may happen with consciousness' (Tavaszy 1929b:15). Theology reflects on preaching and helps preaching by means of its specific scientific analysis; it has no message in itself, but it is a 'testimony about the theology of Jesus Christ' (Cf Barth in *Christliche Welt* 1936. nr. 1-3, 5-6). The difference between preaching and theology is not that of content, but of form and method; preaching uses the tactical-practical method, theology the scientific method. However, due to its content theology is an *existential* discipline; its teaching must affect people in the situation and time they find themselves in; it grasps the special human situation 'hic et nunc'. This is not to say that theology must accommodate itself and ask the help of other disciplines and make its results dependent upon them. Tavaszy thinks that in order

¹² 'Scientific' theology means a discipline working with ordered thought and respecting its characteristic methodology and at the same time shows the relatedness of faith to other areas of knowledge. For discussion on the scientific character of theology see section A.3.b of this chapter.

to make theology address today's questions it is enough for the theologian to live 'in the harsh reality, which speaks and operates through him' (Tavaszy 1929b:15). In order that theology could fulfil its role as a contemporary, existential and academic activity of the church, it needs to be a theology on its way, a *theologia viatorum*. It never can reach a halt, since in its process the revelation given in the Scripture needs to find fresh expressions.

Tavaszy also followed Barth in the major characteristics given to the theological enterprise: its *eschatological character* and the *dialectical method*.

After criticising the authoritative, speculative and historical-psychological methods used in theology,¹³ he shows that the *dialectical method* is a result of dialectical thinking. Tavaszy also called this method the 'Pauline-Reformation way' (Tavaszy 1929a:25). He agrees with Barth that the use of this method is a 'bitter necessity'.

The constant and deliberate use of dialectical method is the recognition that between God's Word and man's word stands the fall. So out of what we hear by faith from God we speak with the knowledge that we stand at the edge of the fall, of this abyss. Therefore, we need to forsake our creativity, the consciousness of our creative power, and deny trusting in our own strength (Tavaszy 1932c:26).

Tavaszy is clear about the fact that this method 'on the basis of the principle of contradiction makes a sharp distinction between God and man, between the divine and the human, eternity and the world, eternal and the temporal, revelation and human experience, Christ and Adam, between the old and new man' (Tavaszy 1932c:26). In the dialectical relation these poles will not mingle or melt together, but the first pole – in the eschatological perspective – will terminate the other with its judgement. Dialectical

¹³ He gives examples of all three. Both Roman-Catholic and Protestant scholasticism used the authoritative method; the speculative method was cherished by the followers of Hegel, and historic-psychological method by the liberal school.

theology, then by its nature is an *eschatological theology* since it emphasises divine judgement entering into the present moment with the revelation of the Word of God.

It is clear from the above that Tavaszy did not follow the way that Barth developed his dialectical method further and that he was only familiar with Barth's 'eschatological word'. For this reason he maintained the dialectical tension God-man, and for the appropriation of the two uses another framework. Instead of turning to a more Christological theology he slips towards a more philosophical position.

f. The Word of God in the Formation of Worldview, Culture and Christian Nationalism

Tavaszy was always interested in the issue of the place of the Christian in the world and how he should regard himself in relation to society. In this larger topic we can differentiate three issues, that of worldview, culture and nationalism which form a kind of loose unity and are somehow related to the doctrine of the Word of God. These issues are interesting for our study since on the one hand these issues are among the rare ones which might be considered the application of the doctrine of the Word of God to other Christian doctrines by Tavaszy. On the other hand they clearly present the impact of philosophy at the expense of the doctrine of the Word of God. At the same time there is a struggle here to create the seeds of a theology of culture, the need of which we can see emerging from our study of the reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania.

(i.) Tavaszy thinks that the *formation of a worldview* belongs to human existence itself, since it is the highest level of self-preservation. Tavaszy's early thoughts about the process of forming a worldview, penetrated by religious philosophical thinking, are characterised by the idea that man himself is struggling with eternity and the cosmos in order 'to get free from the immense weight of them, and feel himself secure in relation with ultimate things' (Tavaszy 1921:551). According to Tavaszy, having a worldview is

a necessity for the human spirit and results from its transcendental make-up. For this reason a world view is satisfying only if it is developed not merely in a rational way, but by considering those roots which 'lead to irrationality, the final factor of all things' (Tavaszy 1921:608).

At the beginning of the reception of dialectical theology (in 1923), Tavaszy, in *Az Út* magazine started a new column entitled 'Science and Worldview'. This fact signifies that at that time he did not think that the creation of a worldview would in any way be incompatible with dialectical theology. In his introduction to the column Tavaszy argues for the importance of having a worldview since every religiosity creates one, including Protestant piety. The factors, which contribute to its creation, according to him, are (religious) life *experience*, and the *apperception* of it, especially by means of the disciplines of the spirit (*szellemtudományok*). 'The apperception of religious experience reaches its aim when the content of the experience is rationally expressed and confirmed' (Tavaszy 1923c:36).

In his treatment we do not see any impact of dialectical theology on Tavaszy's thinking, but we can detect the ideas present in Makkai's 'conscious Calvinism' and in the movement of 'Historic Calvinism' promoted in Hungary by Jenő Sebestyén. In this Calvinist spirit Tavaszy wrote his book entitled *The World-mission of Calvinism* (1929c) and articles such as 'The Basic Issues of the Calvinistic World-View' (1927). Even ten years later there was no major change in Tavaszy's view on the issue of worldview. In 1932 he regarded the making of a worldview as a philosophical endeavour, whose premises lay on 'theistic-biblical' grounds:

The building of a worldview requires synthetic knowledge, for this reason the building of a worldview is possible only on philosophical grounds and only by means of philosophy. The cause, the truth, the spiritual interest is not a philosophical creation, but stands outside of it, above it, however its construction, development, justification can be done only by philosophical reflection (Tavaszy 1932c:54).

The Calvinist framework was important also to Lajos Imre in articulating the issue of a worldview. He talks about this in the context of education. Education on worldview, says Imre, makes known to the object of education that the world is the world of God and every phenomenon in it proclaims his lordship (Imre 1930:37f.). The world comprehended in this way is an organic world, with laws and phenomena which transcend the world and which can never be understood apart from God. For Imre, education on worldview was as important as it was for the majority of the Hungarian Reformed theologians in Transylvania. In this respect we can see the similarity that existed between Imre's position and that of Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian and statesman. Kuyper, as the main representative of modern Calvinism was a promoter of a holistic approach to knowledge and science emphasising the need of an encyclopaedic knowledge of our organic world (see Kuyper 1968:15). With the emphasis on the importance of a worldview Imre agrees with those neo-Calvinists who had a modern view on the world and on the man knowing the world.

Barth looks at the issue of worldview from a different perspective. He thinks that the aspiration for constructing a worldview was a characteristic of the nineteenth century Protestant theology. The intention of the nineteenth century protestant theologians was to find a point of 'reference in the worldviews where voluntary acceptance of the Christian message and the Christian faith suggested themselves more or less convincingly and were viewed at least as possible' (Barth 1967[1956]:20). Their apologetic attempt, however, was in vain since in their attempt they slowly left the Christian message slip in the background and concern for world view and the philosophy supporting it came into the foreground. Similarly Tavaszy placed the formation of the worldview, one of the most important 'pursuits of the Protestant man' on the basis of philosophy and did not bring it 'under the predicament of revelation'.

After clarifying the formal place of philosophy, the next step of our study (in the following section) is to establish what kind of philosophy Tavaszy was referring to, and to see what was the material impact of this philosophy on his theological thinking.

(ii.) The *issue of culture*. Tavaszy was also interested in how the concept of the Word of God, as he understood it, influenced the concept of culture. He expressed his opinion that 'Protestantism believes' that the Word of God is qualitatively different from, and the judgement of, all human speech. At the same time however it requires that 'all human enterprise stands under the fostering of the Word, and consequently requires the forming of a culture. Without culture, therefore, science, art, moral value and a Protestantism which is characterised by worldview are all unimaginable. The tendency for cultural manifestation is an inalienable characteristic of the Protestant spiritual makeup' (Tavaszy 1932a:94).

Two lines of thought emerge from Tavaszy's position. *Firstly*, the quote shows that Tavaszy's concept of culture is not limited to a human medium, the sum of characteristics of living of a certain human community, but it is an elitist view of culture. According to this view Protestant culture has to do with the elevation and refinement of the human race. From this understanding Tavaszy describes the 'spiritual makeup of the [cultured] Protestant man' as being one that does not rely on human authority, is not self-confident, is not pertinacious, obeys God's will, is humble, self-conscious, etc. This standpoint, however, can not be maintained in the spirit of a theology of the Word promoted by dialectical theology. According to dialectical theology these features in fact are not 'characteristics' inherent in human nature, but produced by the encounter with the Word of God in faith; man does not own them, so they cannot be objectified. It is likely, however, that Tavaszy does not talk about man in general, outside of Christ, because man 'outside of Christ always remains a beast, at the best on the initial level a primitive beast and on a more developed level a cultured-

beast' (Tavaszy 1932b:51). But even speaking about man in Christ, Tavaszy considers the 'spiritual make-up' as a permanent endowment of the human constitution.

The *second line of thought* is about the Word creating and separating cultures. If the Word of God is qualitatively different from human judgement and speech, and human enterprise under the nurture of the Word forms culture, then the activity of the Word, in fact, results in a culture that is parallel with the one that is not influenced by the Word. To better understand what Tavaszy talks about here we need to remind ourselves that culture for Tavaszy means 'culturedness'. In this perception the Word brings into the generally human the perception of God and adds values to human existence. It is interesting to see that Tavaszy, in his attempt to develop a theology of culture relied mostly on Brunner and Calvin acknowledging the power of the Word to penetrate fallen human culture. However contradictory revelation and humanity might be, 'the immeasurable greatness and power of revelation can above all break through the boundary, and flow over humanity' (Tavaszy 1929d:52). Even if revelation cannot be contained in the human due to its entirely other nature, the human, by faith can be part of revelation, said Tavaszy. His conclusion is that 'the unity of Christian life and cultural life is only possible by sharing in the same revelation. This statement further implies that the cultural (cultured) life can only be the manifestation of Christian life' (Tavaszy 1929d:52). Tavaszy seeks to avoid the sharp distinction between the human and divine – the human being in danger of being devoured by the divine – and so he adds that the divine revelation has indeed power to 'break through the boundaries of the human', but at the same time it 'does not nullify the characteristic nature of the human, as a matter of fact, it wants to restore it to its particular nature' (Tavaszy 1929d:53). This is possible, however, only through the person and the work of Jesus Christ, who is the only and exclusive condition of the unity of Christian and cultural life. Only that cultural life is not parallel (but is in harmonious unity with the Christian life), and can

be served unconditionally by the believer, which stands under the light and heat of the sun of revelation in Jesus Christ and is continuously renewed and nourished by it. Tavaszy does not deny the existence of a secular culture but finds that only Christian culture (culturedness) is legitimate. The backbone of Tavaszy's argument is probably derived from his value philosophy since the secular and the Christian culture here stand in opposition as value stands over against non-value. The functioning of value philosophy in Tavaszy must be seen in the larger context of his rationalist idealist position, the re-emerging of which in the later Tavaszy spreads new light on Tavaszy's theological position as well.

Tavaszy left humanity and revelation in a dialectical tension. Revelation manifests itself in a specific culture, creating cultural life and remaining in a prophetic relationship with it. Revelation aims to make culture into what it should be, namely, Christian life. Tavaszy's cultural theology is based on an idealistic philosophy and he used a language characteristic of that philosophy. The term 'cultural life' meaning 'cultured life' was used instead of culture, to differentiate it from, for example, biological or natural (non spiritual) life. When he spoke about cultural life, he said: 'cultural life is not other than the lordship of the spirit over the brute natural, respectively the objectification of spiritual life in the realm of the infinite natural' (Tavaszy 1929d:54). By means of this principle Tavaszy explains the concept of *truth* (the self-awareness of the Spirit in logical truth), moral *good* (the self-awareness of the Spirit in the moral good) and aesthetic *beauty* (the Spirit contemplates itself in the aesthetic beauty). Sándor Tavaszy's theology of culture then does not stand entirely under the 'predicament of revelation'. Although it does not go without any references to dialectical theology, it nevertheless misses the potential that it is in Barth's theology to develop a theology of culture, with which I deal in the last chapter of this thesis.

(iii.) The *issue of nationalism* received somewhat a similar treatment in the late 1930s and early 1940s when Tavaszy's attention turned towards this issue. Through the events in Germany and the return of northern Transylvania to Hungary by the Vienna Dictate in 1940, Tavaszy felt an incentive to examine the issue of nationalism in the light of theology. Many were thrilled when in 1940 the Hungarian troops entered northern Transylvania, and even Tavaszy himself regarded this year to be the 'year of returning home' (Tavaszy 1940b). But the German situation and Barth's personal stand and example probably warned Tavaszy to be sober. So he approached the issue of nationalism in a way that might obviate any radicalism and idealist humanism.

His approach to the issue of Hungarian nationalism is not from national politics but from the perspective of Christian ethics. In his lecture 'Contemporary Issues in Theological Ethics', in 1939 he dealt with the issue of race, nation, Christianity and state. Positing the ethical question Tavaszy departs from Kant, who originated the ethical question from experience (the willed act of the practical reason), and Tavaszy begins from theology and theological ethics according to which 'man is always a sinner' (Nagy J 1939:36, Tavaszy 1939:5). Tavaszy develops his understanding of nationalism from the basis of dialectical theology, and his position agrees with Barth's. Tavaszy not only condemns racial discrimination but also disputes the *raison d'être* of the concept of race. Both from the point of view of theology and that of philosophical ethics the concept of race is erroneous, says Tavaszy. From the point of view of biology it is only a secondary concept and from the point view of theology it can be said, based on Acts 17:26, that humanity is a single race. The splitting of humanity in racial groups is the result of the fall and is not part of the ordinance of creation. Tavaszy considers *race* to be a biological concept, *people* (*nép*) a sociological concept and *nation* (*nemzet*) to be the ideal form of a people, since 'for a people, *nation* is a permanent, but never achieved ideal life-form' (Tavaszy 1933:13). The English language, like the Hungarian

differentiates between 'people' (nép) and 'nation' (nemzet) but does it differently. In English 'people' can mean nation, but can also be differentiated as an ethnic group from nation as a political entity. 'Nép' (people) in Tavaszy's conception is the human language community that shares in specific cultural characteristics and 'nemzet' (nation) is the idealisation of those characteristics a 'nép' wants to possess. 'Nép' is the actual, 'nemzet' is the ideal, the eschatological existence. The secular concept of nation (nemzet) is the ideal created by the sinful man so 'the nation belongs to the world that does not live yet under the lordship of Jesus Christ' (cited in Nagy J 1939:36).

Over against this idealist nationalist approach Tavaszy posits the concept of Christianity. In the emerging picture his view of revelation plays an important role. The relation between Christianity and nationality is only possible, thinks Tavaszy, if revelation is conceived not in a vacuum, but in a well-defined cultural context. Since revelation makes an impact on the human context this makes possible the relation of the two. In Tavaszy's opinion nationality is not in sharp contradiction with Christianity, since the latter can give content to the former by means of the Word of God. The concept of nationality in Tavaszy's understanding emerges from humanness, and since God does not contradict the human, but fulfils it, this understanding sheds extra light on Tavaszy's conception of how revelation works. Our nationality is a 'great blessing', says Tavaszy, on the basis of Romans 9:1-3, since 'only in it we can express ourselves and accomplish the personality which is hiding in our individuality' (cited in Nagy J 1939:36). Tavaszy emphasises that God created us not only as humans but placed us into a language community and a culture-setting (a nation-community). The individual shares in the destiny of a nation-community, but at the same time he must bear those challenges that arise from his belonging to the community and 'he does not regard them only as human goals but as coming from God' (Tavaszy 1940c:414).

We need to observe here that Tavaszy differentiated between the concept of 'nation' (nemzet) as the ideal self-image of a people (nép) and the destiny of a people. The national idea is related to the self-determination of a people and the destiny is the expression of God's intention with a people. The Christian shares in the destiny of his people because it is derived from God, to whom his response is 'yes'. Here Tavaszy, basically, applies the same standpoint to his concept of nationality as he already has expressed in connection with culture. This is understandable since nationality is a special expression of culture. As the power of revelation penetrates the human realm that, through faith, can become part of revelation, in the same way God impacts the destiny of a people and lifts it up to be the instrument of his purpose (Tavaszy 1929d:52). This viewpoint in connection to culture led Tavaszy to apply a value judgement on culture, differentiating between secular and Christian culture. By the same viewpoint applied to nationality he reaches the same conclusion: 'the nation should adjust itself to Christ and for this reason only a Christian nation has any validity' – says Tavaszy (Nagy J 1939:36). Parallel with the concept of the 'nation', as an ideal, a Christian view of nationhood also emerges.

In Tavaszy's view an existential anxiety for one's people is in harmony with what Dávid wrote about culture (see section VII.E). Reformulated in the light of revelation, Dávid echoed Barth that 'culture is the task proposed by the Word of God to accomplish man's destiny in his physical and spiritual unity (Dávid 1930:215, Cf Barth 1962[1928]:337). For this reason culture for the Transylvanians seemed to be an existential issue. Dávid, however, by means of dialectical theology reinterpreted culture and instead of thinking in terms of 'culturedness' he wanted to define it in terms of forgiveness, faith and obedience – an ethos unfolding under the lordship of God. Tavaszy also maintains that there is an essential difference between a Hungarian idealist and a Hungarian follower of Christ since while the former attempts to maximise his

own spiritual power to accomplish a human ideal, the latter wants to be obedient to Christ. For Tavaszy, Christianity and Hungarian national identity are in prophetic tension; the latter stands in the temporal frame in which the eternal Christianity materialises (Tavaszy 1944b:281). Such a view of the nation is regarded by Tavaszy as a *Christian view on nation* (keresztyén nemzetszemlélet), which leads to *pure ethnic nationalism* and is the guarantee for the love of the nation, faithfulness to the nation and national discipline. Tavaszy does not lose his responsibility and love towards his people but faithfulness towards it was what drove him to balance and correct with the Word of God the idealist nationalism which leads to arrogance, rebellion or even exasperation in relation to the concrete political situation. At the same time a certain reminiscence of his value philosophy is still present in his position on nationalism, since – as in the case of culture – a Christian nationalism, as a value concept, stands over against an idealist nationalism which emerges from a secular position.

C. Theology and Philosophy in the Light of a Consistent Theology of the Word of God

Sándor Tavaszy's philosophical ideas are scattered throughout his writings and mingled with his theological thought (Cf Tonk 2001:58). As Tavaszy became more open to dialectical theology, an increasing leaning towards existentialism is discernible in his thought. I mentioned at the beginning of section B of this chapter that in the last decade of his life, Tavaszy's literary activity was poor in theological topics. A major philosophical writing, however, stands out as a significant piece of academic work. The *Introduction to Philosophy* in 1948, – his lectures at the philosophy faculty in Kolozsvár 1947-1948 – is basically the restatement of his position from 1928 presented in the study *What is Philosophy* (Tavaszy 1928c). Both philosophical works exhibit the neo-

Kantian-Böhmian idealist position. After an engagement with dialectical theology for twenty-five years this is surprising and sheds new light on Tavaszy's theological thinking as well. It exposes the degree to which dialectical theology was taken seriously and how effective it was in remodelling Tavaszy's theological system.

1. The Question of Anthropology

The treatment of the anthropological question in the last decade of Tavaszy's life – in an occasional manner and in conjunction with other issues – has a strong connection with his philosophical position, which reappears from earlier writings. Tavaszy always treated anthropology adjunctively in reference to revelation, critique of religion and dialectical method. He built on the Barthian premise and regarded natural man, in his totally sinful situation, as separated from God and in enmity with him. Earlier in his *Dogmatics*, Tavaszy treated anthropology as part of the issue of the knowledge of God in chapter 2, the title of which is 'The Knowledge of the Works of God the Father before and after the Fall'. In its content, the doctrine is a traditional Calvinist position with references to the Reformed confessions (see Table 3 in the Appendices).

In the period after 1936, however, Tavaszy's theology shows the image of man as elevated and rising above his sinful, personal and social condition; man is regarded as triumphant over his fate in his existential relation with God. Man, says Tavaszy, is greater than fate. By fate he understands the 'determining factors of the elemental, natural and depraved world'. Fate is not the destiny of man determined by God, that the believer accepts from God's hand, it is rather a fearful expectation of what the future holds (Tavaszy 1948a:283). The natural and social worlds are not independent of God's will, but are incalculable to man. The 'horrible factors' of fate cease to be fearful when the believer sees them coming from God's own hand (Tavaszy 1948a:283). The freedom of the Christian from the coercion of fate increases with his relationship with

Christ and 'triumph over fate means that we can use even the most dreadful situations to transform our life and assist our new life in Christ more and more to emerge' (Tavaszy 1948a:284). This positive approach was very much needed in a time when the Communist takeover was imminent and threatened with new challenges the life of the Hungarian minority of Romania.

He supplemented his existential approach with a more *idealist* viewpoint on man. Tavaszy considered man not only in relation to his fate and existential struggle, but also in his relation to the natural; the natural in this context being the opposite of the spiritual. In Tavaszy's position the theological and (idealist) philosophical concepts blend together. The Spirit – says Tavaszy, departing from Barth – overcomes the natural in culture and in civilisation, 'since culture is nothing else than the partial defeat of the natural in man, and civilisation the victory over the natural, external man' (Tavaszy 1948b:450). 'Natural' for Tavaszy means an entity that is not under the Spirit's control: he speaks about external 'natural' that is nature disturbed by natural evil, and inner 'natural' being the sinful nature in man and its manifestation. Tavaszy acknowledged that the defeat of the inner 'natural' by cultural means (formation of values through science, morals and arts) is only a 'grand experiment', but nevertheless the experiment cannot be given up. 'We emphasise, however' – said Tavaszy – 'that the more we are convinced that this is only an attempt, the more we need to continue this struggle' (Tavaszy 1948b:451). Tavaszy would not give up the idea of the struggle of the Spirit with the 'inner and external natural' even when he tried to look at them in the light of the revelation of Christ. It is true – he admitted – that man alone is powerless in this struggle, but nevertheless he can become master over the natural through Christ. Man has a dignity through his relationship with Christ, states Tavaszy, this time in harmony with Barth. He says: 'if we speak about the dignity of man, we can only do it in the sense, that its basis is not in certain characteristics of human nature, but solely in the

electing grace of God' (Tavaszy 1948a:256). Referring to Psalms 8:5-6 he states that the dignity described in the Psalm 'does not concern man in himself', but only in Jesus Christ, and his dignity is not an external embellishment, but a divine bestowal.

Thus Tavaszy's anthropology releases the initial tension of the God-man dialectic and reaches to the idea of the dignity of man. He interprets the dignity of man in Christ, which is in tune with later Barth. At the same time he uses a language borrowed from an idealist philosophy with universal Spirit in the centre of the system overcoming the natural. Even if the Spirit can be equated with God – and in his early philosophy Tavaszy did this – it is not clear whether Spirit fights the same struggle in unbelievers as in believers. We might presuppose that the Spirit is the Holy Spirit and that it is only Christians in whom the 'natural' is defeated in the internal man. This is entirely in tune with dialectical theology. But at the same time Tavaszy thinks that the Spirit defeats the 'natural' in secular culture, too. This type of rather Hegelian thinking introduces more tension into Tavaszy's system than it resolves and distances him further from Barth's position. Tavaszy's idealism points to the need of recognition of a certain general revelation, since this assumes an ongoing activity of God is self-revelation. The idea that the Spirit is working in all cultures and the Word of God bringing forth and working in Christian culture is a good starting point for a theology of culture. This idea, however, would not be in tune with the way Barth thought about God working in the world. We shall see in the next chapter that other Transylvanian theologians also inclined to accept the validity of general revelation and by this they came closer to Brunner's teaching than to Barth's. Tavaszy, however, under the influence of the early Barth does not explicitly recognise the validity of general revelation and his thinking remains under the tension resulting from this fact.

2. Existentialist Features under the Impact of the Word of God

Tavaszy's position on philosophical issues sheds extra light on his theological thinking and indirectly on the whole process of the reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania. As I pointed out above (see VI.A.1) there are those who judge that Tavaszy was and remained a philosopher all through his career.

Very early in Tavaszy's writings he was concerned about the German church situation related to Barth's struggle there. He reviewed Barth's article *Theologische Existente Heute* and was very sympathetic with Barth's position, drawing from it conclusions for the church situation in the rest of Europe, and especially in Transylvania. Tavaszy and other theologians appreciated that Barth clarified the concept of the church 'which has a great impact on the practical life' (Czirják 1936:99, see also Nagy O 1933). Tavaszy, impressed by Barth's struggle, turned his attention to 'theological existence', which he thought is being the same as the existence of 'living in the church'. The existential problem of the church is that the people in it do not yet recognise the 'intensive and exclusive demand of the Word of God' and do not trust in the Word of God. The Word touches human existence so deeply – said Tavaszy – that it is the only reliable guide of life in the present day situation.

Tavaszy became convinced that theology must have an impact on personal and social living. For this reason he produced a considerable amount of writings related to social phenomena and living.¹⁴ He always seemed to be interested in social issues, but the more he was interested in dialectical theology the more he seemed to become aware of them.

¹⁴ Among his early writings there is a 'Critical Guide' for the 'Spiritual Crisis Today' intended for the use of the young people (Tavaszy 1923a), he wrote about capitalism, socialism and communism and their relationship to Christianity (See Tavaszy 1931a; 1934b). The Vienna Dictate in 1940 gave him the opportunity to express his opinion on actual issues (See 1940a; 1940b; 1940c; 1944a).

Tavaszy expressed his concern for human existence in philosophical terms when he dealt with the issue of existence and reality (Tavaszy 1933a). In times of disorder – like the one Tavaszy lived in – philosophical thinking is closer to life and is more vividly interested in the issues of existence and reality. Observing his age, Tavaszy thought that not only the civil society but also the whole human existence was in crisis. This fact ensures that contemporary philosophical thinking cannot be a speculative dialectic, but the dialectic of existence.

Tavaszy under the pressures of the events of the first half of twentieth century Europe seemed to shift his philosophical allegiance. He rejected *naturalism* in the main trends of European philosophical thinking, complaining about the lack of any transcendental factors in it. At first sight idealism, which looks for the ultimate ground of existence and reality, seemed to be a more promising approach in which ‘all natural reality is only the ramifications, the crust of existing reality’. The ground of all existence is in ‘pure being’, an ‘ultimate reality’, which is God, so the reality of existence and the laws of existence can be known only from this Absolute. The result of this thinking was that idealism neglected the natural, material side of existence as something incidental, having nothing to do with real existence. Such thinking led to a ‘mystical concept of God, who, if looked at closely, is nothing more than man’s own projection elevated to the infinite’ (Tavaszy 1933a:180). This, however, is not the Christian position on God and humanity. Although Tavaszy rejected idealism as a system, some aspects of it influenced his thinking.

Idealism, according to my personal conviction, as a worldview, is nothing more than the opposite of Christianity. As a way of thinking, it generalises the concrete realities of Christianity to the point where these melt into its characteristic humanism. In idealism God becomes a ‘primary ground’, the new man ‘spiritual man’, the requirements of the divine become ‘ideas’. [...] The primary facts of Christian revelation are sublimed, spiritualised and generalised until the ideology of idealist thinking is achieved, with which it can operate according to its wish (Tavaszy 1933a:180f.).

In this context Tavaszy appreciates Kierkegaard's existential thinking. Kierkegaard raises the existential question along with the question of God. Proving God's existence or existence in general – according to Kierkegaard – is not possible, since the knowing subject does not know the existing reality through logical deductions, but first accepts what exists and then proceeds with deductions. Existence needs to be assumed before we can speak about the reality of its manifestation in acts (Cf Tavaszy 1937a:184). At the same time Kierkegaard did not separate thinking from existence, says Tavaszy: 'The existing thinker can think correctly about himself only if in what he is thinking about he also exists'. The subject who really exists in his thinking constantly creates his own existence, and whatever exists in his thinking he brings into his existence. In this way thinking is constantly part of existence (Tavaszy 1933a:185). Tavaszy does not follow Barth's line of thought according to which truth is an event (see III.C.2.d), but expresses the same idea through the analysis of Kierkegaard's ideas. He appreciates that Kierkegaard struggles against so-called 'pure thought' especially in its Hegelian form. Hegel by means of 'pure thought' desires to establish 'pure' existence. According to Kierkegaard, says Tavaszy, both pure thought and pure existence miss any reality (Tavaszy 1933a:186). Tavaszy thinks that philosophy must consider the human subject who is the starting point of knowing about existence and reality; it releases the subject from the domain of 'pure thought' and places it into the existential domain.

Man must receive back his existence character in philosophy, too, not only for the sake of a philosophical anthropology, but also for the sake of the knowledge of existence and reality. The thinking of a man placed back into his existence character will be different since he will be living in his existence and also he will be starting from his existence in his thinking process, too (Tavaszy 1933a:194).

According to Tavaszy the existential analysis needs to start from an ontological a priori, from which existence and reality can be grasped and thought. It is clear that

Tavaszy did not become an existential philosopher and did not give up a metaphysical explanation of existence (Tavaszy see 1931d:8). The role of metaphysics, Tavaszy argues, is to provide a monistic view on the world. What makes metaphysics different from Christian thought is that for metaphysics the object of knowledge and thinking is God, but for Christian thought God is not the object of knowledge, but is the God of self-revelation. This explanation of reality and that of Christian thought bears the marks of dialectical theology.

Tavaszy came in contact with existential philosophy because of the existential elements present in dialectical theology; revelation is conceived as a personal encounter with God in which the Word of God touches and determines human existence. Tavaszy, however, did not go further than that towards an existential philosophy. He thought that dialectical theology owns certain specific and desirable characteristics over against existentialism. Dialectical theology builds on the Word of God, the object of dialectical theology is God's revelation, faith as a gift of God is important in grasping revelation, and in faith man's whole existence is grasped. 'Dialectical theology', says Tavaszy, 'like existentialism, considers man as a whole, not in his celebrating mood, but in his sinful situation, as one suffering under the burden of sin. Although dialectical theology will not remain with the man that lives in trouble it looks to the repenting man as he turns to God' (Tavaszy 1996:56).

Márton Tonk is right about Tavaszy's philosophical position when he says that Tavaszy stood in a dualism of philosophy and theology, and that Tavaszy's existentialism was determined by his contact with the Barthian dialectical theology (Tonk 2001:62). I however, think that the poles of this duality are not of equal

importance, and that his theological position, namely his allegiance to the theology of the Word prevailed.¹⁵

3. Philosophy of the Spirit and the Word of God

If Tavaszy's allegiance prevented him from taking on board existentialist philosophy it was not as effective in the case of the value philosophy he upheld at the beginning of his career. In fact the raising of the anthropological question in the late 30s and 40s is what prompts us to refer to the importance of Tavaszy's philosophy.

We have seen above that in Tavaszy's anthropological position man is on his way towards ennoblement and fights the natural both within him and in the physical realm. In fact Tavaszy borrowed this idea from Böhm's philosophy where it appears in connection with the knowing subject. I have already presented Böhm's philosophical position in section II.C.2.a, and here I want to parallel some thought of Tavaszy with his. According to Böhm (and Tavaszy, too) knowing is realised by the self-projection of the knowing subject: 'all that can be known stands as an object over against the philosophising subject which is formally and materially the projection of the knowing subject' (Tavaszy 1928c:26). Projections, said Böhm, are of two types: *activity* and *creativity*, the examination of which determines the two main branches of philosophy. Activities 'arise arbitrarily due to compelling impulses', but creativity 'happens under conscious impact'. Projections realised through activity give 'the actual image of the real world', and Böhm (and Tavaszy, too) call the branch of philosophy dealing with this image *ontology*. Projections given by creativity give the 'image of the required (kellő), valid or ideal world'. Böhm called the branch of philosophy that studies the required

¹⁵ Tonk comes even closer to this idea when he writes: 'In spite of the fact that certain interpreters are still debating the question whether the thoughts of Barth or that of Kierkegaard impacted first on Tavaszy, for me the former option is unequivocal ... It is obvious that in Tavaszy's thinking the issue of existential philosophy was built in through Barthian mediation' (2005:34).

world, *deontology* or *axiology*. ‘According to these two aspects’ – said Böhm – ‘philosophy consists of truths that contain ascertainment, and truths that contain binding deductions’ (Tavaszy 1928c:27, see Böhm 1996:40-41). Man determines actively the world in which he exists since ‘man’s world is not only made up by what an *other* (object) does in it, but by what he *himself, creates* in it with his own strength’ – and this is the more important part of the world. Tavaszy says:

[...] we are more interested in this, [i.e. what man creates] than in what is already there, because by this we take part in the work of eternity and we weave in its grand tissue our humble thread, but which is indispensable for the modelling of the world. There we are hustled wildly and crudely [activity] – *here we validate our own strength by rejecting and conquering the brute force of the physis* [creativity]. The endless range of creation stretches into the future like the changes of reality which perish in the blur of the endless past (Tavaszy 1928:27 italics added, see also the preface to Böhm 1906.)

Twenty years later, in Tavaszy’s anthropology we face the same image of man struggling with the brute force of the physis (natural). That Tavaszy’s philosophical position did not change in twenty years – and these years were the years of Tavaszy’s activity as a theologian – is mirrored in his lectures of 1947-48. The *Introduction to Philosophy* is not a neutral work from a theological point of view, but bears the mark of systematic philosophical thinking.¹⁶ No doubt, we can regard this piece as being the mirror of the philosophical thinking of the late Tavaszy.

Tavaszy did not work out a coherent synthesis between his philosophy and theology. His thought includes diverse influences such as the value philosophy of Karl Böhm, theological liberalism, idealism, Calvinism, dialectical theology, and existentialism. Analysis of his *Dogmatics* will also show that a systematic synthesis is missing. We can only guess the form and the content of a possible synthesis.

¹⁶ Although the written lecture is schematic in some places its style allows us to presuppose that it was intended for publication. The work was not finished due to Tavaszy’s illness and relatively early death. He lived for 63 years.

Considering his lectures on philosophy we can only refer to the possibilities of such a feasible synthesis.

For Tavaszy philosophy is mainly related to epistemology and this is understandable if we consider that while he condemned romantic idealism, he joined his neo-Kantian approach with a rationalist idealist philosophy. The human spirit – he says from this rationalist idealist position – bears in itself the incentive to ‘grasp all the aspects of the manifestation of being in reality in its origin, in its deriving source’ (Tavaszy 1999:42). Specialised disciplines cannot fulfil this demand due to their nature, since they set their task to the study of the parts. The nature of philosophical knowledge differs from the nature of specialised disciplines because philosophy aspires to grasp and express the general since ‘philosophy is the science of final and universal principles that establishes reality’ (Tavaszy 1999:49). For Tavaszy the knowing and describing potential of philosophy is all-comprehensive and he does not ascribe any epistemological feature to theology or religion. If Tavaszy considers philosophy as an all-embracing discipline, then theology can be only one specialised discipline among the others. Philosophy of religion also would have a descriptive character since ‘its task is the research of the essence, meaning and value of religion’ (Tavaszy 1928c:47). Philosophy of religion, according to Tavaszy, cannot be interested in how the knowledge of religions originates and in what is the substance of religion. It is true that Tavaszy thinks that the more significant part of reality is the ‘world of values’. The world of values is to be reached ‘only through living in holiness’ and ‘without the divine reality it is empty and dead since the divine is the highest point of spiritual life’ (Tavaszy 1928c:48). Tavaszy emphasises that philosophy is the discipline that deals with values. His theological position in 1928 was close to the philosophy of religion, and he was faithful to the idea that philosophy is the science that studies the final principles that establish reality as a universal whole.

From the perspective of a theological system Tavaszy's position also points towards the need of natural theology at least in the sense of general revelation. There is a need to consider that the Spirit somehow is present and working in a given culture without explicit reference to special revelation. In his *Dogmatics*, however, Tavaszy does not follow this route. Regarding general revelation he echoes Calvin in saying that God 'has revealed himself in nature and in history, but man's dullness due to sin is so great that he is not able to read anything out of this Revelation' (Tavaszy 1932c:74). God has revealed himself both in the human mind and in the constitution of the world, but due to sin in man only a 'little seed is left that is never possible to be out-rooted entirely, that is, that there is a God'. Man stands before the cosmos as one 'who only contemplates it rather than a worshipper and an admirer of the Creator' (Tavaszy 1932c:75). Tavaszy does not negate general revelation – and with this he rather follows Calvin than Barth – but he considers it largely useless because it is not possible to know God by means of general revelation, unlike special revelation. It also seems that he understands 'general revelation', like Calvin, in the static sense of 'natural revelation', permanently given.

Philosophically Tavaszy stood on a rationalist-idealist position highly appreciative of the common rational ground of humanity. For such a position human rationality is that form of knowledge, by means of which the world is grasped and logically ordered. By means of the mind human rationality is not only able to raise questions, says Tavaszy, but also 'following the questions it is able to proceed to find the answers'. The mind is regarded not only as a mere instrument, but it is the bearer of lawfulness, it is a lawgiving forum, which up to a certain boundary is identical with that 'lawfulness that penetrates and unites the existing reality' (Tavaszy 1928c:37). This means that above both reality and the human mind rules the same logos; 'so reality and the logic of the human mind, up to the measure of the boundary of the human, are the same (Tavaszy

1928c:38). This is how Tavaszy arrives at the idea of the Absolute Spirit and unites certain elements of Hegel's, Kant's and Böhm's philosophy. 'Truth' – he says – 'is ready in the Absolute Mind, but for us can only be the result of a logical knowledge. Truth is bigger than the human mind, but nevertheless it can be known in the concrete form of truths' (Tavaszy 1928c:39). In Tavaszy's thinking the Spirit is not only self-conscious, but also it is evaluative. 'The Spirit' – he asserts in his later lectures – 'knows itself not only as being real, reflecting itself in the light of self-consciousness, but realising its own unequalled nature, it knows itself as having value, even the highest value, by which it measures all things' (Tavaszy 1999:45). The self-evaluation of the Spirit eludes human philosophy, which is not able to grasp the evaluative activity of the Spirit in its unity and entirety. For this reason philosophy grasps only fragmented value-ideas, which however are the 'modes of the highest value'. Tavaszy takes on board those value-ideas from Böhm that are expressed in *hedonistic* and *idealistic* values. He thinks, however, that the value-ideas are not comprehensive enough so he introduces a fourth one, namely the category of Christian values. 'We need to take up again into the philosophical investigation', he says, the big question – that once Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and even Kant dealt with – whether Christianity might be a new dimension of spiritual life, not from a historical, but from a metaphysical perspective' (Tavaszy 1928c:45). Here Christianity (theology) appears again as an important factor inside the limits of philosophical thinking, but only inside of it and not above it.

Tavaszy follows Hegel's path since he speaks about the Spirit that 'grasps the universal real in values and universal values in the real. Spirit may struggle up to the level where it can contemplate the parts of the knowable world in the correlation of the large Whole and it is able to judge all issues, not according to mere givenness, but according to pure transcendental principles' (Tavaszy 1999:46). Due to the activity of the Spirit positive cultures may arise 'in the measure the Spirit is obeyed by the culture'

and in this way the Spirit becomes a positive force of cultures and civilisation. Thus the issue of culture is included in the sphere of philosophy. From a theological perspective, Tavaszy's philosophical position, namely that the Spirit of God is working in culture constructing civilisation belongs to the area of general revelation. The exploration of general revelation, however, did not happen since Tavaszy perhaps thought that this would not be possible from the perspective of Barth's theology. Thus the tension between his philosophical and theological position remained unreleased.

D. Conclusion on Tavaszy's Achievement

The confessed aim of Sándor Tavaszy was to bring theology under the 'predicament of revelation', a task in which he mainly succeeded. In opening up dialectical theology for the church in Transylvania he made the successful first step in clarifying the nature of revelation and its impact on theology. He personally, however, could not finalise this project, due to the specific events in his life, which prevented him from giving more attention to Barth's later theological development. The most important impact on Tavaszy was Barth's understanding of the doctrine of the Word of God, a doctrine that became so important for Tavaszy that he even resisted the allurements of a career as a philosopher – to which otherwise he was attracted.

Tavaszy's theology is most developed in form and in content in his *Reformed Christian Dogmatics* that bears the obvious marks of dialectical theology. The three major critics of his *Dogmatics* were right to point out its importance. Török realised that Tavaszy is like a watchman trying to defend the proclamation of the church against any mixing of the Word of God with 'human additions' (Török 1933). Makkai, although having a different theological position, appreciated that Tavaszy raised all the questions the church faces in the light of the Word and revelation (Makkai 1932:163). Dávid

emphasised that Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* is a 'reinforcement and revitalisation of reformation theology' (David 1933:28). All these observations are true in their place. The critiques, however, omitted to consider whether or how the doctrine of the Word of God in the *Dogmatics* becomes the determinant factor for all the doctrines of the Christian church. Dialectical theology and the theology of the Word of God is present only in the prolegomena of Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* and does not bear fruit in the body of the formulation of other Christian doctrines, except in certain aspects of Christology and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. These doctrines were so related to the doctrine of revelation in dialectical theology, that Barth had expounded them already in his early writings. I agree with Árpád Ferencz that Tavaszy's *Dogmatics* presents us the most mature phase of his theology and that Tavaszy's theology was 'decisively influenced by Barth' especially by his early works. On the basis of what we saw above, we may feel justified to consider that the statement that Tavaszy in his *Dogmatics* 'thought together with Barth and not only took over his theological assertions' is an overstatement (Ferencz 2005:203-4).

Applying the doctrine of the Word of God to the larger interest of Christian truth was left to the second-generation dialectical theologians in Transylvania. Tavaszy followed Barth in almost all aspects of his doctrine of revelation, as it was known before Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. It is worth remembering that at the time Tavaszy wrote his *Dogmatics*, the first volume of Barth's dogmatic architecture, the *Church Dogmatics*, was not yet published. Tavaszy took over from Barth the idea of the wholly transcendental nature of revelation, a God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, who is the only possibility of revelation. In him God is hidden and revealed at the same time.

Tavaszy following Barth also emphasised the key role that faith has in the doctrine of the Word of God. In spelling out of the doctrine of faith itself, however, Tavaszy rather follows Calvin aided by some references to Barth. Tavaszy linked faith

to election and called it an 'inwardness' given by God and does not regard it as a psychical process. The role of the event of revelation is emphasised, but he uses a less dialectical language in describing it. He follows Barth in the doctrine of the Bible, too, drawing on what is common in Barth and Calvin. The very characteristic aspect of the reception here was that Tavaszy emphasised that the Bible is only *in actu* the Word of God, namely in the event of revelation and faith of God's address. The confessions are regarded as 'standard and classical commentaries on the Scripture', which can be revised by the church. This option is only a theoretical possibility for Tavaszy since there is not a single hint of any disagreement with Heidelberg Catechism, which Tavaszy thinks to be the most adequate and a real guide for his own theological enterprise.

The doctrine of incarnation is the closest to the doctrine of revelation in dialectical theology. Tavaszy follows Barth's Christology in saying that the 'divinity of Christ is the subject of his humanity' (Tavaszy 1932c:170). To avoid the radical consequences of this doctrine Tavaszy reverts to Calvin and the confessions.

Tavaszy is at his best in the area of ideas enclosed by the triangle Barth-Calvin-Confessions. He himself confessed allegiance to Calvin and when he argued in favour of dialectical theology he declared that dialectical theology is a modern expression of Calvinism. In fact he shared in this argument with all the Transylvanian theologians who shared his enthusiasm for dialectical theology. In Transylvanian theology there was an attempt to read back into Calvin certain aspects of dialectical theology like the alleged use of dialectics by Calvin, and trying to find the dialectic of finite-infinite in his theology. To regard Calvin and dialectical theology in close relation would be a Transylvanian version of neo-Calvinist resurgence, parallel to neo-Calvinist movements in the Netherlands and Hungary in the same period of time. By now we can see that Tavaszy did not just copy Barth, but intended to adapt his theology to the Transylvanian

scene. This is evident from his use of philosophy and culture, issues that Tavaszy did not bring entirely 'under the predicament of revelation', although he significantly distanced himself from his earlier position of cultural Protestantism and partly from his earlier neo-Kantian views. Towards the end of his life we see a re-appearance of neo-Kantian value philosophy mingled with a rationalist idealism, which casts extra light on his theological position as well. Philosophically he is in the position where a place is to be secured for the universal work of the Spirit, but theologically this is not expressed through a doctrine of general revelation. Holding Calvin's limited view on natural revelation – namely that God revealed himself in nature to all, but this revelation is not effective due to sin – he maintains the tension between his theological and philosophical position. His interest in existentialism did not lead him to adhere to an existentialist philosophy but kept his interest in his earlier endeavour to define a worldview by means of metaphysics.

Finally we can say that Tavaszy played a major role in the reception of Karl Barth's theology of the Word of God in Transylvania. Due to his contribution the theological scene was radically changed towards openness for the Word of God. The theology of the Word of God proved to be an efficient means of overcoming theological liberalism in the land. Tavaszy's own view on reception, however, was not to pursue a whole and thorough take-over of the Barthian system. In this respect it is interesting to see how he evaluated, for example, a new book of bishop Ravasz on preaching. Tavaszy seemed to observe some impact of dialectical theology on Ravasz's homiletic approach: a turning away from 'the artistic demands borrowed from aesthetics' and a turn to 'the majestic thread of the Word of God'. He also appreciated the fact that Ravasz recognised 'that not the preacher is the subject of preaching, but the Holy Spirit' (Tavaszy 1937c:17). Tavaszy did not aim for a reception of the whole Barthian dogmatic system. He was satisfied if the reception of Barth's thought led to 'the

perception of the preacher in preaching, that Scripture does not only talk about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, but that in Scripture God himself speaks in Christ through the Holy Spirit' (Tavaszy 1937b:190). Tavaszy calls theology having this approach a 'new reformation theology'. This statement, however, is not entirely in tune with his early position that dialectical theology brings a new reformation of the theological system. It is more in accordance with what bishop Makkai thought, that dialectical theology is only a corrective factor for Transylvanian theology. It seems that Tavaszy did not himself fully follow the *new reformation model*, whose most eminent exponent he was. Tavaszy tried to integrate the entire heritage of Transylvanian theology in his thought – for which Sándor Makkai strove right from the beginning – but used the Barthian concept of the Word of God to create a more evangelical theology that was in harmony with the resurgent Calvinism of his days.

CHAPTER VII

A THEOLOGY EMERGING UNDER THE IMPACT OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

This section aims to deal with other important issues that were raised in connection with dialectical theology in Transylvania by theologians other than Sándor Tavaszy. The study is done with reference to the models presented in Chapter IV, but the material is arranged in relation to different doctrines in their specific context.

A. Perception in Transylvania of Karl Barth and his Ministry

In 1931, Tavaszy praised Barth for being *only* and *entirely* a theologian. He highly regarded Barth's 'prophetic seriousness' reflected in the fact that he submitted his life entirely to the 'cause he served'. 'He, without hesitation and precipitance lives only in the category of a theologian... his seriousness and theologian-nature is determined by the *condemning seriousness* of the Word', writes Tavaszy appreciatively (Tavaszy 1931c:269).

Through German theological publications available, Transylvanian theologians in the 1930s were up to date with what Barth did and wrote. Their sympathy bridged the distance and prepared the way for his visit to Transylvania in October 1936. All the major works of Barth were reviewed in Hungarian publications. Barth's struggle with

German National Socialism was followed with sympathy, out of which Barth seemed to emerge as a hero of modern-day Protestantism, defending the authority of the Word of God and the primacy of Christ as the head of his church (Tavaszy 1929b; 1936a).

Gyula Dávid in 1936 tried to clarify Barth's Reformed theological position against those who might suspect that teaching in different universities in Germany and Switzerland meant different theological positions. Göttingen, Münster, Marburg, Bonn, and Basel are only 'external stations' in his journey, Dávid declared. Inwardly Barth is the same Reformed man that he was at the time of *Römerbrief*. Barth is a real theological scholar of the type that is 'not borne in libraries and behind desks, but the type that deserves the title *theologian* by pressing through the narrow gate of a necessary and accepted task' (Dávid 1936a:97). For Dávid being a theologian is not a privilege gained by birth but is the result of obedience to God – it is a duty. This description fits Barth entirely – said Dávid – and it is no wonder that he is loved and followed by many Transylvanians (Dávid 1936a:97).

Lajos Imre too, regarded Barth as a modern day prophet. On the eve of his visit to Transylvania in 1936 Imre thought that his prophetic voice could not be silenced any more. Against all the past resistance of church officials Barth's merit in fighting natural theology was to be recognised. Rejecting natural theology by Barth seemed to Imre a compelling act in order to protect God's sovereignty, against the 'bloody reality of renewed humanism, state totalitarianism and man-worship' (Imre 1936a:260).

This appreciation was expressed by the group of theologians that regarded Barth's theology of the Word as a new reformation, even if not all of them agreed wholeheartedly with what Tavaszy initially said about Barth's theology along the lines of what I have called the 'new reformation' model. The most remarkable theologians who can be considered working in the framework of the 'new reformation' model are Lajos Imre, Lajos Gönczy, Gyula Dávid and Dániel Borbáth. These theologians were people

for whom dialectical theology was the first theological system they came in touch with and they had not experienced a theological 'conversion' from liberalism to confessional Calvinism or dialectical theology. The initial 'continuity model' that claimed that dialectical theology is in close connectedness with earlier trends was represented by Géza Nagy. His approach was not embraced entirely by the younger generation but some of his ideas were accepted by a number of theologians. Even among those who were generally welcoming to Barth's theology there were differences of opinion about certain aspects of it. As we shall see below, on the scene of theological ideas opinions and positions clashed and interacted. Towards the end of the 1930s a more or less unified position emerged. The resulting consensus was that Barth's theology was certainly Reformed and could bring about a renewal in the church, but at the same time the theologians were more sensitive towards contextual issues and less dismissive of philosophy and general revelation. Alongside these theologians, there were some that were less enthusiastic, but their number gradually decreased and by the late thirties the opinion of the former group had become the estimation of the majority.

B. The Word of God in Revelation

Some Transylvanian theologians approached the issue of revelation with sensitivity towards their theological inheritance and set the question of revelation against its understanding in liberalism and of the study of religion. In the period of our study three prominent theologians wrote in a more elaborate manner about the challenge of dialectical theology for the doctrine of revelation: Dániel Borbáth, Géza Nagy and Béla Tankó. In their evaluation of dialectical theology Borbáth starts from the issue of philosophy of religion and Tankó from the study of religion. Borbáth promotes dialectical theology especially as presented by Emil Brunner. On the one hand he makes

an effort to mediate between former theological trends and on the other hand ensures more space for a conversation between dialectical theology and the Transylvanian theological and cultural scene. Tankó however is inclined to reject dialectical theology on philosophical grounds.

1. The Legitimacy of Philosophy of Religion

As we have seen above that Tavaszy was the most inclined to accept Barth's critique of religion and philosophy of religion (see IV.A.2). Tavaszy took on board the Barthian critique of religion as representing human possibilities. His critique extended to a large extent to the philosophy of religion and to theology that became the study of religion: 'revelation is qualitatively different from the a priori ideal and any of its historical expressions, since history and revelation are incommensurable... So we need to look for revelation not in history but exclusively in the Word' (Tavaszy 1929a:39, 1929d:43). Other Transylvanian theologians, however, did not share Tavaszy's opinion. Arguments about the legitimacy of philosophy of religion and a certain rehabilitation of religion were put forward.

a. Argument from the Religious Phenomenon

Philosophy of religion was important for Borbáth since it was the religious ideology of former generations. Theology after Schleiermacher attempted to prove the truth of religion by means of the study of religion. For theology with such interests the use of philosophy was vital. Borbáth agrees with Barth that this theology departed from a living contact with the church and whenever theology 'takes the road marked by Barth, philosophy of religion is not needed any more' (Borbáth 1933:23). Borbáth echoes Barth's saying that 'the theologian is to speak about God'; the object of theology is God's self-revelation, as it speaks to us in his own word and through his own word; in

the only place – in Jesus Christ. He defines theology as being a testimony about God presented in a systematic scientific manner (Borbáth 1933:23). Investigating the phenomenon of religion will not give anything new to the task of the theologian since it is a human product; in religion man meets man not God. However, Borbáth also says that Barth's position, according to which 'religion stands over against revelation: as religion presents the existence of man, in the same way revelation presents God's existence', greatly surprised the Hungarian theologians (Borbáth 1933:24). In fact, Borbáth in his opinion about religion, philosophy of religion and natural revelation draws more on Brunner and Hermann Kutter than on Barth. He accepts their view that religion is not the noblest product of human spirit, as it had been taught. In religion there is something from the 'tearing-away-from-God's way of life' of the miserable man, bearing on it all the marks of his humanity. The essence of religion, however, is not identical with the essence of Christian faith. On the basis of such religion man is not able to tell who God is; he is in need of God's self-revelation in order to know him.

Borbáth in opposition to Barth does not fight against religion. He thinks that the concept of religion should be redefined after its corruption by the study of religion and Barth's strong attack on it. Religion is to be understood in a positive sense as Brunner and Kutter do, and after all: Christian faith can be called religion. 'Of course', he says 'religion against which Jeremiah, Paul and Luther raised their voice still exists, but religion of which institutions Calvin has written, also exists' (Borbáth 1933:44). Tavaszy was more in tune with Barth in rejecting religion than Borbáth was, however even Tavaszy spoke about Christian life as being the 'authentic religion' (see IV.A.3). Religion, although it has the mark of a broken humanity, thinks Borbáth, is better to be seen as the human answer to God's revelation, and the religious person as one addressed by God and shaken at the foundation of his existence by this address. Barth's negative approach to religion, argued Borbáth, is due to the fact that he regards religion purely as

the 'subjective, human side of the relationship of God and man', as being the 'last solution to solve man's disturbed relationship with God' (Borbáth 1933:44). Religion as a description of the God-man relationship in general is still legitimate and since religion exists, it is also legitimate to talk about philosophy of religion.

The theologian, when God grasped him in Jesus Christ and when he became his witness, inevitably feels the necessity to explore why there are other responses too, to the revelation of God; why there are responses of the kind against which the prophets, apostles and the reformers struggled (Borbáth 1933:44).

Such a philosophy of religion exists only due to the fact that God has spoken. Borbáth, following Brunner, designates the area of philosophy of religion to the prolegomenon to dogmatics. As a direct consequence of this view he affirms that 'Christian faith does not deny the existence of a pre-knowledge of God, moreover it presupposes it, but confesses that the living, personal God can be known only by personal encounter. This encounter is not general, but special, it is that to which Christian faith looks' (Borbáth 1933:27).

b. Argument from the Nature of Religious Experience

Considering Barth's description of religious experience Géza Nagy also maintained the possibility and necessity of philosophy of religion. He says that the category of religious experience cannot be entirely expelled from theological terminology, since in the Christian religion there will always be an experience, and the task of theology is not to deny it, but to clarify it. According to Nagy theology does not dispense with philosophy of religion since – without interfering in the business of the former – philosophy of religion can show the connecting points of God's life to historical development and to the human spirit (Nagy G: 1930:607).

Géza Nagy thinks that the reason why Barth cannot accept any truth of divine revelation outside the Christian religion is due to his system. Barth's view of religion is

based exclusively on man's subjective relationship with God; he looks only to the human side of religion. For this reason Barth considered religion as rebellion against God. He is driven on the one hand by the desire to construct a pure notion of faith, which is free from any ceremonial, affectionate character, and on the other hand to show that the main task of theology is not to clarify the reality of religion. Barth, however, did not judge the content of religion correctly, argues Nagy. He operates with the notion of religion inherited from Schleiermacher, which he vehemently opposes (Nagy G: 1930:603). But there is something more in religion; it is not only human search, or conscious hiding away from the face of God. Barth follows Calvin in denying the possibility of knowing God by the degenerate human being. But in Barth this lack of possibility means something different than in Calvin. Barth means that the world outside of biblical revelation is without any knowledge of God. For Calvin, however, the knowledge of God is not only given for the human mind, but God continuously renews and increases this knowledge. This knowledge is blurred, and needs to be looked at through the corrective 'glasses' of special revelation, but it is still knowledge (see discussion in section V.B).

In connection with natural revelation Nagy agrees with Kaftan, that the monotheism and universality of Christian faith reinforces the idea of general revelation. 'If God is one and if he is the God of the whole world', says Nagy, 'than you cannot reject the idea that he did not leave himself without any testimony' (Nagy G 1930:604). Nagy did not agree with Barth when he said that general revelation has to be the whole truth, otherwise it is not revelation at all. Revelation is one, but the way of its communication and its conditions may have a preparatory or fragmentary character. Nagy concludes that the opposition between religion as a human product and revelation as a divine act is not as rigid as Barth wants us to believe. This is also true in connection with religious experience.

Nagy thinks that Wilhelm Herrmann's definition of the relation between experience and revelation is correct. He said that experience is God's work, and revelation is its source. Reformed theology worth its name never put experience on an equal rank with revelation. Experience needs to be always dependent on faith, argues Nagy. Now, the role of dialectical theology should be to sharply delimit these two phenomena, which earlier dogmatics used interchangeably or as parallel phenomena (Nagy G: 1930:605). Nagy understands the reason why Barth rejects the validity of experience for theology: he protests against putting man on the same rank with God and against the accessibility of God to man without the help of God. But Barth was not the first to say this either. Calvin too, reacted against this idea, but he never went so far as to deny that God is conceivable by our spirit. Calvin left a bridge between God and man, a bridge that could not be destroyed even by the fall. This bridge is human spirituality, maintains Nagy. His conclusion is this: '[S]ince in religion experience is and will always be present the task of Christian theology too, is to show how it can be purified for the benefit of faith. Consequently, theology does not make philosophy of religion redundant' (Nagy G 1931:607).

c. Argument from the Scientific Character of Theology

Béla Tankó made a review of dialectical theology from the point of view of its scientific character, but he was not satisfied with the result. In his essay of 1931 'The Scientific Character of Theology; An evaluation of dialectical theology' he criticised especially Barth from the position of the study of religion school. Tankó, like Makkai, rejected dialectical theology, but from a more philosophical-theological basis than Makkai did and not as much from the reference to the specific Hungarian situation and culture (see IV.B).

Tankó laid down a theory of scientific knowledge against which the scientific character of all disciplines is measured. Theology should be measured by the same standards as the other disciplines since the 'scientific make-up is determined by the same a priori presuppositions regardless of the object of the discipline'. Tankó based his view on science on the interdependence and logical congeniality between the object and subject of knowledge by means of the universal logos manifested in the human spirit. The possibility of scientific knowledge lays in this objectifying activity of the spirit, the mind having no other duty than to faithfully trace the logic residing in its object of knowledge. The value of science is in the fact that it is never ready with the explanation since the mind discovers in the object of knowledge new logical connections (Tankó 1931:260).

Tankó thought that dialectical theology did not correctly criticise liberal theology. He admitted that at the turn of the century psychologism and historicism weakened certain elements in the self-understanding of religion, but even liberal theology lifted its voice against such tendencies. Like Nagy, he thinks that the positive contribution of liberal theology is significant (see IV.C), since it tried to defend the absoluteness of Christianity, the self-value and autonomy of religion against all psychologism and historicism. Tankó thought that the theology being criticised by dialectical theology 'did not fail to fulfil its duty, since it did exactly what dialectical theology tries to undertake. Moreover it prepared the way for dialectical theology ...' (Tankó 1931:262).

To add a personal note to his criticism of dialectical theology Tankó continues:

It is obvious that its constructive and prophetic character enchanted those who joined dialectical theology; in short, its tendency to achieve practical goals and what is equivocal in it, enchanted even such an excellent scholarly mind as Sándor Tavaszy. Prophetic mission certainly is a desired charisma for which many would long today... It would be a biased short-sightedness not to sense such a prophetic fire in Karl Barth. But while prophecy and scholarship might be in a sublime union in a gifted person, qualitatively they would remain two different activities of the same indivisible person: forcing them together would be awkward (Tankó 1931:263).

We can see in Tankó's position an allegiance to an accepted theological position articulating the most common charges against Barth's position. It is not our task to defend Barth against Tankó, but rather to look at Tankó in the context of Barth's reception in Transylvania. Tankó at this point is the proponent of a theology based on Karl Böhm's philosophy of value (II.C.2.a). He argues that the most important discovery of modern theology was the emphasis placed on the activity of the evaluative consciousness (Tankó 1931:270). The role of religion is to serve as the ultimate anchor for human life, anchoring man in the absolute reality, the bearer of all existence and reality that is the Absolute. But the Absolute for Tankó is a value-category, the activity of the evaluative consciousness and not an ontological reality. Tankó admits that Barth and his colleagues have the merit of taking the idea of the Absolute seriously, but their mistake – said Tankó – was that they interpreted the Absolute as an ontological reality (Tankó 1931:270). Tankó is faithful to his philosophical heritage based on the neo-Kantian philosophy of value and he is closed to any challenge of prophetism emerging from Barth's theology. Tankó's conclusion regarding Barth's theology is entirely negative and rejective.

The degree to which the idea of the Absolute is taken seriously in the sense of a transcendental reality, it becomes increasingly difficult to appropriate the individual and finite being to the life-bearing power of the Absolute. Besides this type of Absolute there is no place for the individual finite reality... This is the reason why it is impossible for Barth to realise the high-level synthesis in which the dialectical way would reach its goal. The synthesis is not possible; the Absolute denies it (Tankó 1931:271).

Borbáth – who is closer to Brunner than to Barth – shows a tendency to soften the cutting edge of the Barthian position in an attempt to bring dialectical theology closer to the mind of the Hungarians and make it more congenial to the reformed theological tradition in Transylvania. Without any doubt, his position would better stand cross-examination from a strictly Calvinistic theology. Borbáth and Nagy leave space for a

certain amount of philosophical enquiry on theological issues, a desire that has deep roots in their tradition. Borbáth's position also establishes the possibility of the scientific character of theology, which consists 'not in the fact that theology is to be established by general truth, but completely the opposite, it consists in the systematic expression of this non-general, special [truth of revelation]' (Borbáth 1933:42). Theology is a discipline bound to the definite reality of the revelation, its place is the church and its content is the biblical revelation.

2. General and Special Revelation

Borbáth observed that the issue of revelation is set to be the central issue for theology. Tavaszy also referred to this earlier when he said that it is vital for theology to come under the predicament of revelation, otherwise it will not be worthy of its name and will remain a discipline in the rank of cultural disciplines (Tavaszy 1929d:3).

After setting up the contemporary theological scene, Borbáth declares over against Tankó that even cultured people are in search of revelation as they are not satisfied with responses that are predominant in rationalism, materialism, empiricism and relativism. Man is in search of the transcendental, the eternal 'Other'. This transcendental is in revelation. Barth – said Borbáth – brought back to theology the idea that revelation is in the fact that *Deus dixit*, a view that is in contradiction with what Troeltsch said: 'Christian revelation – like all revelation – is the intertwining of human and divine. The eternal divine seed and the human vessel are inseparable, since revelation is the *self-communication of God in the human spirit*' (cited in Borbáth 1931:115).

In his essay Borbáth presents what Barth and Brunner have said about special revelation. The presentation is important because it is the first time in the Transylvanian Reformed context when careful attention is given to Brunner, the other great figure of

dialectical theology. Borbáth in his essay aims to justify Calvinism over against the study of religion school, and he uses contemporary dialectical theology as a tool of demonstration.

In spelling out Barth's doctrine of revelation Borbáth in fact follows closely Barth's *Christian Dogmatics* and does not seem to bring new ideas about revelation, compared with Tavaszy. The fact that Borbáth also presents the doctrine of the Word of God demonstrates that Tavaszy was not a voice calling in the wilderness – he was not alone with his ideas. We cannot see anything distinctive in the first part of Borbáth's presentation, except that Barth's theology has become more popular and is presented again three years after Tavaszy first wrote affirmatively about it. Barth is mostly quoted in relation to special revelation.

Borbáth ascribes the use of general revelation to the study of religion school; which regards revelation as a general communication of the divine. Barth however repudiates general revelation only seemingly – says Borbáth (1931:155). He argues incorrectly that Barth recognises the validity of general revelation and implicitly also of natural theology.¹ He means by this the existence of what Barth calls 'testimonies' about the one and unique revelation that happened in the years 1-30 AD. These testimonies are not only those existing in the Old and New Testament, but at the same time outside of the canon, namely: nature, conscience and pagan world. Borbáth, however, ignores both the difference of view that strained the relation between the two great dialectical theologians Barth and Brunner, and an examination of whether the charge against Barth of dispensing with general revelation might be true.

Similarly Géza Nagy thinks that Barth's theology does not do justice to God's universal work outside the biblical revelation since 'real life is much more under God's

¹ Borbáth quotes pages 136-137, 148, 149-152 from Barth's *Christian Dogmatics*.

rule than Barth would admit' (Nagy G 1930:608). Nagy thinks that Barth's purpose in excluding revelation outside Christianity was to protect the purity of faith and to keep faith as the sole basis for theology. He considered Calvin to be more open than Barth, since Calvin did not leave the world outside revelation without the knowledge of God. Nagy could not accept the argument Barth used for rejecting natural theology, namely that general revelation should be the whole truth otherwise it is not true at all (Nagy G 1930:604). Nagy concludes that so long as Barth 'will not see the operation of *gratia universalis* in a more positive way, as Calvin did, he will not be able to connect his thought to the cultural life as, for example, Kuyper did' (Nagy G 1930:615).

Borbáth presents Brunner's view through his book *Der Mittler*. Through the need of having a Mediator in Christianity, Brunner establishes both its superiority over against other religions and the uniqueness of revelation in Jesus Christ. This does not mean, says Borbáth, that Christian faith, according to Brunner, would deny the existence of general revelation (Borbáth 1931:159). He quoted Brunner: 'It is not possible to believe in the unique revelation, in the Mediator, without the revelation of God given in nature, history and especially the revelation given in consciousness'.² This revelation however is a broken one (*Gebrochene Offenbarung*) and it is not to supplement the revelation in Jesus Christ. Revelation in nature is not a part of special revelation but rather a broken, a distorted truth; for the sinner there is revelation only in Jesus Christ. In Borbáth's understanding Brunner says that what God wants to say to us is in Jesus Christ and nowhere else, and what he says to us is not something, but he himself.

What Borbáth sees in Brunner directs our attention to Calvin, and Borbáth himself does not fail to observe the link. Barth's position seems to Borbáth a little one-sided –

² Borbáth quotes from Brunner's book, *The Mediator* (E.T.), without exactly specifying the page number of his quotations.

like all corrections usually are, he said (Borbáth 1931:164) – but Brunner's position reflects that of Calvin. The answer to the question '*Where is revelation?*' is found in what Calvin said in his *Institutes*. God first revealed himself as God the Creator and then as God the Redeemer. As Creator God is revealed in the human mind and in the constitution of the world; there is no place in this world where we could not see the work of his majesty (Inst I.v). The sinner, however, cannot understand this revelation, as the eyes of a poor-sighted man cannot perceive the letters of a book. Special revelation in Jesus Christ is needed otherwise revelation is not accessible.

We see here the application of a Tavaszy-type gauge, namely measuring with Calvin. Dialectical theology is correct since it communicates what Calvin said, and if it does so it is to be accepted as such. This does not mean, however, that dialectical theology is not to be appreciated as a new channel of communication of proved and accepted truth.

C. Man in the Light of the Word of God

One of the greatest impacts of dialectical theology was the change it brought in the area of theological anthropology. To regard humanity as being under the influence of the condemning and elevating power of the Word of God became an important issue of the Transylvanian reception of Karl Barth. Compared to earlier trends the task of dialectical theology is 'to put anthropology back in its place', since without it 'orthodox delight in the Gospel and Christ's sacrifice on the cross will not take us any further', as Aladár Gáncs³ said (1930:570). He indicated that 'the most ardent power of Barth's testimony is in his anthropology', since 'nobody from the apostle Paul onward has uttered so

³ Aladár Gáncs was a Lutheran churchman, but I have included him in the reception of Karl Barth by the Reformed church in Transylvania since his article was published in the Reformed Review reaching a Reformed audience and due to its appearance it enjoyed acceptance by the editors of the paper.

implacably the absolute fact of the fallenness, corruption, futility, and sinfulness of man as he has. In Barth's opinion fallenness is not a state that man can grow out of and leave behind by the help of the grace of God; fallenness and corruption is a state which extends to the pious as well' (Gáncs 1930:570).

This is how Aladár Gáncs perceives Barth's teaching about the condition of man. The solution to the human problem, said Gáncs, is brokenness; clearing ourselves out and becoming poor in spirit. These expressions used by Gáncs, however, denote human activities; Barth would rather use terms related to divine activity instead.

In pondering the human condition Gáncs seems to allude to the controversy of the Reformed church with the 'pietist' towards which Gáncs himself seems to incline. He emphasises that Barth did not solve the issue of sin once for all. To warn those who fight against a certain 'repentance concept' that was taking shape in Barth's theology, Gáncs said that the fact that sin is not done away, which does not mean that anybody can abuse the concept of repentance. Instead, Barth's argument is, said Gáncs, that 'every day we need to make a whole step through the doorstep of the narrow gate, without reasoning that this is enough for today since this would be the parody of repentance' (Gáncs 1930:571). He also addresses warning words to those who have experienced God's judgement on their sin and the light of God's grace shown on their life:

I never can tell that I am for God and there is nothing in me against him. From a human point of view our life is like a stair on which climbing higher we better realise who we are and we are frightened of ourselves ... The fear of God is the sense of our distance from God, is humbleness, and obedience – this is the attitude befitting God (Gáncs 1930:571).

Gáncs, as we can see, was not interested in anthropology as a part of systematic theology, but showed attention to it as a constructive church worker. He said in

connection with Barth's anthropology that Barth develops it until he reaches the 'new man' (Gáncs 1930:571).

With Gáncs, we witness an interesting adaptation of Barth's theology: he looked to what he learned from Barth through his personal perspective and applied it to his own ministry. There is a strong desire in his writing for the renewal of the Transylvanian Protestant communities and for this reason he built the Barthian theology into his discourse and renewal program.

Sándor Makkai in 1926 touches on man's sinfulness when he writes about repentance in his *Self-conscious Calvinism* (Makkai 1926). He confesses that he is not from the camp of the promoters of dialectical theology (see III.B), but instead he sets the goal of reviving a self-conscious form of Calvinism in Transylvania. The measure of the influence of dialectical theology on his position (if any) is not discernible from his writings at that time. Makkai speaks about how a Calvinist person should regard his religion in the present context after rationalism and liberalism has atrophied the church. The revival of Calvinism is possible only if it becomes religion again, says Makkai. By this he meant that Calvinism needs to become preoccupied again with the relationship of man and God: 'if we are to restore Calvinism to its inner and true source, to the state where the meeting of the sinful man with the merciful God is possible' (Makkai 1926:8). It is possible for man to meet with the merciful God, but only if he considers himself really sinful. Due to his sinful state when man meets God in his majesty he is shaken in the foundation of his being. For Makkai repentance is an event in the course of which a 'deadly judgement for sin and liberation to do good' is announced. This experience, however, is a possibility of a humble sinner only: 'only he can meet the grace that annihilates him in order to renew him – the arrogant man filled with himself meets only his destiny and fate' (Makkai 1926:8). Any dialectical theologian could have

spoken this sentence since it so eloquently expresses the dialectic of God and man put forward as early as 1926 when dialectical theologians were just gathering their ranks.

Makkai knows and promotes a type of Calvinism in which real knowledge of sin is possible, and as a religion that demands true repentance, requiring a 'deep, personal, bitter condemnation which is like a sentencing to death' (Makkai 1926:9). Makkai would not consider somebody to be a Calvinist who 'assesses in the anguish of his soul the deadly effects of his mere human nature, abilities and acts and does not become astonished by the horrible and disfigured image he can see' (Makkai 1926:9). The same person says this who four years later at the theological consultation in Nagyenyed said that what dialectical theology is able to give to Transylvania is not a new thing since Reformed theology there has already produced the results that dialectical theology intends to achieve. Indeed, his talk about sin and repentance would be worthy even of a dialectical theologian.

The systematic exploration of the man standing before the Word of God can be done from an ethical perspective as well. Gyula Dávid points out aptly that Barth and Gogarten caused a dilemma for ethics. This is true both in terms of its content and its system. Dávid surveys Barth's *Das Problem der Ethik in der Gegenwart* and comments critically on it. He observes that Barth has rejected the Kantian ethical inquiry since in his system the problem is the ethical subject itself. Kant builds moral personality on the autonomous will determined by the categorical imperative. The Kantian claim however does not solve the problem since between his ethical subject and the real man known to us there is a big difference. Kant is wrong, says Dávid following Barth, in that he presupposes man's freedom and possibility to good if man had learned what the *must* is: 'We do not have a right knowledge about the idea of freedom, we know about man just that he is not a personality who lives in the realm of freedom' (Dávid 1934a:53). Dávid

admits with Barth that the ethical issue reveals man's crisis which man is not able to solve.

Dávid pays attention to Barth's ethical construction, too. According to Barth the ethical subject (as an individual and as society) is searching for the ethical object. The ethical object, however, imposes humility on man because of the dichotomy between what man *must* do and what man *can* do. From the idea of ethical object, man arrives at what the Bible calls the fall, anterior to any history and any other determination (Dávid 1934a:55). From the perspective of dialectical theology there is fresh light shed on the ethical issue: 'The negation flowing from the concept of God leads to the truth of the way of the cross' and places the ethical question into man's relationship with God (Dávid 1934a:55).

Dávid is not satisfied in every respect with Barth's ethical construction. Barth's response to the ethical question is that he states its insolvability and announces in Jesus Christ the Word of forgiveness. Dávid thinks that such a resolution, whatever positive aspects it might have, does not make possible the construction of an ethical system. Dávid however feels that Barth's initial rigidity is only due to his preoccupation with bringing central issues into the centre. He appreciates the judgement brought by Barth against ethics, since ethics has become an aggregation of material 'the content of which is not ensured by the seriousness of forgiveness based on the revelation of the Word of God' (Dávid 1934a:57). Therefore for Barth, ethics basically is equal with Christian life and the goal of ethical behaviour is to turn away from this world to another one. David's conclusion regarding Barth's analysis is this.

In Barth's approach we witness the revival of the approach of the reformers the characteristic of which is man's new relation with himself, with God and the world ... The attempt, which looks for solutions to the questions of life, has nothing to fear, if it makes God extraordinary, great and unique and man the humble servant of this God. It is repeatedly and even more clearly true that with dialectical theology a new way has opened up to solve life's specific questions (Dávid 1934a:58f.).

However, when we look to the appropriation of the anthropology of dialectical theology in Transylvania we see that the content of this anthropology was also presented from a Calvinist basis. This helps us understand better Makkai's position when he argued for the dispensability of dialectical theology in Transylvania. Man and his misery, together with the way of repentance, was put forward without any significant differences between Makkai and the dialectical theologians.

There is also a tendency to take a step further from the theoretical basis of accepted anthropology in two directions. The first is towards its practical application in the mission of the church. This application as we witnessed it with Gáncs was not a slavish one, but it enriched his existing understanding and ministry. This is wholly in accord with the spirit of Barth, who never wanted to be simply emulated but seen as the witness to the Word. The other direction of development is the tendency to use anthropology and attempt an ethical system-building. It is true that the attempt reached only the phase of clarifying the principles and did not present significant original features, but it was still important in preparing the ground for further developments.

D. The Word of God in the Church

1. Theology as Word of God in the Church

The thought of Transylvanian theologians about the importance of theology for the church at this time followed closely Karl Barth's ideas. Theology is considered to be the science that serves the church, and that is practised by those who are involved in matters of faith and not only the intellectuals. Theology as the self-evaluative activity of the church is very important; as Borbáth puts it: 'The last word belongs to Jesus Christ in the church in every matter, but the penultimate word belongs to theology' (Borbáth 1936:345). Under the influence of dialectical theology the role of theology in checking

the church is brought to the fore. This attracts not only the renewing of theological activity but at the same time encourages theology to take on a constructive approach.

The conception of theology as preaching in scientific form enhances its justification as a church activity. There is an insistence that church and theology cannot be separated, since theology reflects on the Word of God preached in the church. Their separation will lead to the annihilation of both (Imre 1936b:497). Theology and the church share a common task, which is preaching. The church preaches in the world and theology preaches for the church. This task of theology is to validate the Word of God in all the areas of church life; examine the church and perform a constructive critique of it on the basis of the Word, urges Lajos Imre (Imre 1936b:499). This standpoint entitles us, he adds, to hope for the renewal of the church, towards which the Transylvanian theologians are showing the way. It is most important, however, that the top leadership of the church shares these ideas in order for them to become effective.

The relationship of church and theology cannot be one-sided; the church also gives something to theology. Otherwise they would part company just as the lifelessness of the liberal church contributed towards the disengagement of theology from the Word of God. 'The living church always has a living theology' – said Imre confidently (Imre 1936b:499). The church at the same time provides the scene of the theology's struggle for the purity of the Word. Transylvanians wanted to avoid the appearance of a theology independent from the church. They themselves were servants of the church as pastors or teachers. In Transylvania all theological education and theological work has been linked with the church and no theological faculty independent of it has existed.

2. The Constitution of the Church

Barth defines the church in terms of hearing the Word: 'The church is the congregation of those who hear the Word, of those thankful who do not look back to any merit and

cannot think of any repayment. In the church the ministry of the Word is done, in the power of one grace, that has been given to this church in order to call the elect of God into this church that they might *obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus*' (Barth 1937a:9) In Barth's definition the pivotal point is the hearing of the Word and the call of the elect is linked to the mission of the church. It seems that in Transylvania the doctrine of predestination still governed the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the Word of God could not get into the definition of the church.

Borbáth in his attempt to clarify the concept of the church rejects liberal theology that maintains that the church is constituted by those 'who accept the teaching of Jesus, the faithful teacher who sacrificed himself, as being a theory in accord with their religious requirement' (Borbáth 1932:3). In his debate Borbáth draws on the formulation of the confessions using the concepts of election and predestination. The church is the multitude of those who are chosen for eternal life and not those characterised by common religious preferences (Borbáth 1932:3). He also acknowledges that the actual participation in the church is preceded by a subjective moment; he does not call it 'repentance', but it can be called as such. Borbáth does not describe this moment in the language of dialectical theology, but regards it as a moment of man's existential search. According to him, man starts asking questions about his life and eternal future, but he does not find an adequate answer to them either in mythological or in scientific worldviews. When man is pressed down by the crisis of the thought of eternity he hears God's Word through the message of the Bible presenting God as his Lord, Creator and Redeemer and at the same time he hears God calling man to himself. Borbáth emphasises that man cannot know God; God is the one who tells who he is and who man is; he tells what the word is like and what is its future. When man realises who this God is, who through Jesus Christ – the sum of revelation – has embraced him, he commits himself entirely to God. When this happens man becomes

part of the church and only then he can say the relevant passages of the Heidelberg Catechism: 'I am the property of my faithful Lord and Saviour' (Borbáth 1932:4).

Borbáth – similarly to Tavaszy – refers to the catechism to define the character of the church. From this definition, however, the decisive presence of the Word of God – as a word addressing man in his human existence – is not missing. The direct effect of dialectical theology on this discussion cannot be proven, but if it is right to consider the rediscovery of the Word of God under the impulse of dialectical theology, and so it is, then an indirect influence is evident. Here, however, we cannot talk about the whole reception of dialectical theology since man in Borbáth's view is still searching; he evaluates what is wrong and what is good, he still has questions to find answers for and he finally finds them in the Scripture. In Barth's thinking, by contrast man's questions become evident only in God's answer that determines even man's question.

3. The Preacher and his Message

The centrality of the Word in theology and of preaching in the church was accepted shortly after the emergence of dialectical theology in Transylvania. Lajos Gönczy, in the introductory study to the Liturgy-Book in 1929, refers to the centrality of the Word in the Reformed liturgy:

In the centre of liturgy stands the Word, the will of God revealed and incarnated in Jesus Christ and the aim of our whole worship service is to prepare us for the reception of the Word and for making us worthy of obedient reverence of it. Our worship is characterised by the lordship of the Word. There is place in it only for what emphasises or validates the centrality and dominance of the Word (in Makkai 1929:11).

The liturgy is that kind of church activity that prepares God's way for the congregation, but the acting subject of it is God, who through his Word and Spirit rules the church. The Word is given to the church in the Scripture. For the Reformed this means – says Gönczy – that the Bible not only in content but also in form determines

the liturgy: this fact leads us to reject not only what the Scripture explicitly condemns but also what it does not commend (in Makkai 1929:9f.). This is a standpoint that even now determines the form of the Reformed liturgy. Gönczy's opinion may raise some objections but it is not our task here to evaluate this position for the mission of the church and building-up of the church. We may, however, note that according to dialectical theology we cannot fix the form in which the Word addresses us.

a. The Aim of Preaching

The expectations about the changes dialectical theology would bring to preaching were high. Tavaszy declared in 1930: 'Hungarian preaching is a burning fuse; the time has come to end this situation. Gönczy's lecture served exactly this purpose'. We are going to look at the lecture Tavaszy referred to.⁴

According to Gönczy the central act of liturgy is the ministry of the word in which God gives himself to the congregation through scripture reading and the sermon. In the scripture reading the Word speaks directly, in the sermon indirectly through a witness. Preaching is a mystery in which God meets man and is the occasion of the release of great power. Here Gönczy is in tune with Barth when he says that 'this mystery was not given in the hands of the worship leader. The best sermon in itself is not sufficient to accomplish it [the mystery] and the worst cannot be a hindrance in its way' (in Makkai 1929:21, see also Barth 1937a:12).

Having said this, Gönczy finds contemporary preaching in a great crisis. The emptying of the churches proves that preaching has lost the relevance it had in the past and that it ought to have in the present. He blames the unfortunate development in

⁴ The lecture was given at the conference in Enyed in 1930, and published a year later. See Gönczy 1931.

theology and its approach to preaching. In his argument with past movements⁵ he debates the idea of a *didactic preaching* (Gönczy 1931:6). The aim of the sermon cannot be merely instructive (*építő*) since it has to be the same as the aim of the whole worship service: the personal encounter of God and man. Gönczy's argument emerges from a specific understanding of what teaching is because he says that a didactic sermon would not let the congregation speak – only God addresses man in it. However, a personal encounter, required by the aim of the worship service, asks for both parties to be active (Gönczy 1931:6). This specific understanding of preaching as teaching does not only preclude relationship, but also thinks of the education process itself as 'a certain help towards the perfection of the person taught'. The aid would not be needed once the person reaches perfection. Applying this line of thought to the church, if the sermon is regarded as having an educational role it becomes dispensable once it reaches its goal – namely the perfection of the congregation. Since this is never achieved the sermon cannot have an educational aim (Gönczy 1931:7).

Gönczy rejects not only didactic preaching, but *expressive preaching*⁶ as well. Preaching with an 'artistic aim' looks to the congregation not as the object of the sermon, but as the subject of it, expressing the religious conciseness of the congregation (Gönczy 1931:7). Such preaching lacks a goal outside its sphere. This type of preaching solves the problem of the passivity of the church, since preaching becomes the activity of the church. It also fits into the aim of the worship service, since it is built upon what is already there in the consciousness of the church and not on what is missing from it. It disregards, however, the real need of the church, and speaks about it as if the message of the sermon was already being accomplished. 'This type of preaching' – says Gönczy

⁵ His sources are mainly German liberals like: M. Schian, Fezer, A. Schadelin, Niebergall.

⁶ Actually Gönczy calls it 'artistic preaching' in the sense that the sermon expresses the religious consciousness of the congregation like a piece of art expresses the feelings and thought of the artist.

– ‘loses its connection with the real congregation and its credibility, because the preacher exposes the religious consciousness of an ideal church, in which case he is not only unfaithful to the self-defined concept of preaching, but he is in danger of conferring an educational character on his preaching’ (Gönczy 1931:8). The shortcoming of these two types of sermons, according to Gönczy, is that they are not able to show the right direction to the Word of God since their practice and theory are anthropocentric. ‘Such sermons’, says Gönczy, ‘do not look to man from God’s point of view, but look at God from a human point of view’ (Gönczy 1931:9). He thinks that at the root of this is a false understanding of the aim of preaching, and a faulty understanding of revelation; dialectical theology however, has brought along the necessary correction, since believes that revelation is in the Scripture and rejects the turning of revelation into a human experience. On the one hand in tune with ‘modern theology’ dialectical theology opposes the dogmatisation of revelation. On the other hand revelation does not only mean that God has spoken, but that he has spoken in the Scripture in a form that is beyond the boundaries of all human understanding (Gönczy 1931:13). We have knowledge of revelation, according to dialectical theology only if it becomes subject to us. Gönczy, however, thinks that this conception of the Word is not a discovery made by dialectical theology, but that of the Reformers (Gönczy 1931:13). Here Gönczy is in tune with other Transylvanian dialectical theologians to present Barth’s theology as a reformation theology.

b. The Task of Preaching

Gönczy argues that the task of preaching cannot be other than to make way for God’s own Word through the preacher’s own words. This concept was spread by dialectical theology, but it is in tune with the two thousand years tradition of Christian preaching. Scripture indeed is ‘useful for teaching and rebuking’, but its power is not in man’s

hand. Gönczy says that ‘the Word does it, sometimes with us, sometimes in spite of us’ (Gönczy 1931:22). What is beyond the task of ‘preparing the way’ the preacher should commit to the Holy Spirit and can stay calm since he knows he is not able to do anything – he is not the master either of the Word or the church.

The efficiency of the preaching is in the Word of God, declares András Tunyogi whose language is not as exclusive as Gönczy’s. Man is not able to preach the word effectively unless God comes to help him. According to him the work of both is needed – they work in a kind of synergism – since preaching is the intelligent ‘presentation of truths appearing in the Bible, without which the work of the Spirit would be incomprehensible for man’ (Tunyogi 1936:132). Tunyogi tries to balance the dialectic tension between God and man, the divine and human element stand together like ‘darkness and light, fire and water’: the nature of both is unchanged. This is a miracle that escapes all analogy.

c. The Content and Form of Preaching

The emphasis of dialectical theology on the Word of God as the content of preaching looks a new idea to András Tunyogi. He thinks that dialectical theology is not only a new theological school, but rather ‘an entire new trend of thinking standing in total opposition to the theological orientation of the nineteenth century’ (Tunyogi 1936:135). This statement ranks him among those who regarded dialectical theology as the beginning of a new era in theology. He however equates the Word with ‘the content of the canonical Bible’. Referring to Barth, he gives great importance to exegesis (Tunyogi 1936:134f.).

Gönczy argues that the Word, as the content of the sermon, first reaches man as a judgement. This idea is congenial with the perception of the character of revelation in dialectical theology. Gönczy wants to clarify the charge brought against dialectical

theology, according to which dialectical theology brings in an 'un-Christian concept of God's wrath' (Gönczy 1931:32). He admits that judgement is in the forefront, but considers judgement as the work of grace: if God addresses man, regardless what he is saying, that is the sign of his grace. In this way he tries to integrate judgement into the process of the 'coming home to God' of the *homo viator* who has begun his journey home. The sermon should tell man that the door to God is open for him. Characteristically Gönczy does not speak about what happens when the sinner arrives home; in fact there is no arriving home to God in this earthly life. This is not in the central attention of dialectical theology; the Word only judges, awakens, challenges us to decide. But what does dialectical theology have to say to one who has already decided? Does dialectical theology lead sinners only to the entrance hall of Christian life? How does preaching change once a sinner is repented? What is repentance? Is the sermon different in content if addressed to believers instead of unbelievers? What is the nature of Christian life in relation to the Word of God? There is no attempt made by Hungarian theologians to clarify the position of dialectical theology and answer these questions, the importance of which is connected not only to preaching but also to the whole Christian life and the practical possibility of the whole theological system.

The content and form of preaching – according to Gönczy – in dialectical theology is determined by the theocentric connection of the elements of the preaching which are the Word, the preacher and the congregation. As a result of this new link of the elements of preaching a new image of God emerges. He is no longer presented as the means of human well-being, but as 'sovereign and holy Lord, a judging and merciful will, an acting person, confronting man and world. He is the beginning and the end; he is the supreme and only goal, compared to whom everything is only a means' (Gönczy 1931:30). Gönczy echoes Barth saying that preaching does not look to man in his relationship with man, but with God. Preaching is interested in what man is before

God and man regarded from this perspective is miserable, in contradiction with God and himself and far from God. Preaching prepares the solution out of this situation advocating the possibility of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The message to the world is the same as the message to the individual: Eden became wilderness due to man's breakaway from God. So long as the disengagement lasts, there is no hope for the world. The world even became an oppressive power for man, but when it will be reconciled with God it will become the source of endless blessing and a wonderful work place for man (Gönczy 1931:31).

As far as the form of the sermon is concerned, the change is surely to be welcomed. Gönczy emphasises the importance of a serious fidelity to the text which 'for the sake of the topic will never force the meaning of the text, but for the sake of the text is ready to sacrifice the topic' (Gönczy 1931:32). This does not mean the neglect of the rules of formal homiletics – but rather it provides more freedom for the reader against the rules. The sermon becomes simpler – since the preacher's trust is not in the structure of his speech (Gönczy 1931:32).

d. The Preacher's Effort and the Work of the Holy Spirit

The preacher cannot escape from the impact of his condemning message; as he preaches judgement he also feels the burden of the preached Word. 'The undertaking of the preacher is hopeless' – says Gönczy – 'if he feels relaxed and self-confident at the pulpit, if his heart is not beating faster whenever he opens his mouth to speak' (Gönczy 1931:24). Here we see again the emphasis dialectical theology places on crisis, but we do not read anything about whether the crises can be healed and how the listening and preaching of the Word might cause joy instead of fear.

The work of the Holy Spirit is highly regarded in the effectiveness of preaching. Gönczy praises dialectical theology for its theocentric approach in relating the elements

of preaching together. This means for Gönczy that the burden of preaching is not on the preacher but on the Spirit of God. Preaching is under the authority of God and not of man. This recognition confers self-consciousness and humility to the pastor. He knows that he is only the *minister verbi Dei*; he is only a servant, a Herald (Gönczy 1931:16). The preacher is released from strain since the results of preaching in no circumstances are related to his activity. There is only one bridge between the person of the preacher and the effect of the preaching: the fact that the preacher first heard the Word he is going to preach. Gönczy does not speak about the possibility of this single link being missing; we might ask what happens if the preacher, not being addressed by the Word, still trusts that the Word will address his congregation. This standpoint about the preacher's effort and the work of the Holy Spirit can not only lead to the renewing of preaching, but also runs the danger of making it more shallow if the preacher really thinks that 'the burden of the preaching is not on man, but on the Holy Spirit' (Gönczy 1931:29). Gönczy does not speak about any human condition for the preacher to hear the Word of God like surrender to obedience, prayer, watching the spiritual needs of the congregation, etc. In this area – as in many others – the divine threatens to swallow up the human.

Gönczy, however, would like to avoid the impression that the efforts of the preacher are totally in vain. The Word reaches its way to the concrete situation of listeners through the personality of the preacher, affirms Gönczy with Barth. For this reason the preacher should not deny himself – his thoughts, gifts, rhetorical skills – but rather he should give them entirely as means to the use of the Word (Gönczy 1931:26).

e. Theocentric View on Preaching and Transylvanian Tradition

In the debate following his lecture at the Enyed conference in 1930, Gönczy expressed his opinion that in the Reformed tradition in Transylvania the theocentric approach to

the relationship between the elements of preaching had been promoted earlier than the appearance of dialectical theology. He referred to László Ravasz who once said: ‘we need to consider the most important, and at the same time the most imponderable factor: the Holy Spirit’ (Gönczy 1931:33). Gönczy’s concern is that parallel with the spread of dialectical theology in Transylvania the deeper meaning of Ravasz’s position might be explored and its meaning verified by a scholarly research. His aim was to attempt to show the continuity with the past of the new ideas of dialectical theology.

The aspiration of placing the ideas of dialectical theology into the existing tradition is evident. But Gönczy would like to justify the need for these new ideas and not to refute them, as was the case with Makkai. In the justification of dialectical theology an attempt to link it to a former theological work or to an accepted authority like Calvin can be observed.

4. The Mission of the Church in the Light of the Word of God

With its strong emphasis on the Word of God proclaimed in the church, dialectical theology might be expected to shed new light on the mission of the church in Transylvania.

a. The Socio-Cultural Mission of the Church

In the history of Transylvania the mission of the church has been defined in various ways, among which the national and cultural role of the church has been a significant factor. Related to the time of our study it is worth mentioning Makkai’s position in which we see the mingling of evangelical, cultural and political understanding of the mission of the church.

As we have seen in Chapter I, bishop Sándor Makkai was interested in all aspects of church-life in society. Referring to the situation after World War I he said that the

Reformed church is 'the last pillar of the juridical and institutional organism standing above the ruins' of the Hungarian social life prior to 1918 (Makkai 1931:357). In the tragic post-war situation the church was under the necessity to accept tasks that would have been the duty of the state. He described the Reformed church as being a timber-raft on which all kinds of national, social, cultural and even economical problems got on board. The church in this situation was 'faced with the demand to be the maintainer, encourager and protector of national life, of social order, of Hungarian culture and Hungarian existence' (Makkai 1931:357).

According to Makkai, the fulfilment of such demands is not alien from the Reformed church life, since these demands are 'ancient claims of Calvinism and refer to activities which – at least partially – were always professed and practiced by the Reformed church'. The political upheaval – according to Makkai – confronts the church with the 'mirror of its own and original face'. Makkai according to his own program of a 'spiritual church in a spiritual nation' (Makkai 1931:358, see II.B.2) was convinced that the social cultural task of the church must be taken seriously. The task, however asks for the renewing of the church, since only a spiritually mature church can fulfil it. Without it the church becomes only a political factor and its program will be political instead of confessional-social. Makkai complains against the rationalism and liberalism that has almost killed the church (Makkai 1931:358). In the past the character of the church was reduced from a spiritual community to a political one; the church replicated exactly the class and rank categories of the society. This approach to church life collapsed with the Hungarian society in the tragedy of Trianon. In this situation Makkai considers that the church should be renewed along Calvinist and confessional lines (see II.B.2.a and IV.B). The solution lies not in the church abandoning its social role, but in the church becoming a *real church*; when it lacks external power the church needs to become a spiritual power: 'this means that the foundation of the church is only Jesus

Christ and not the nation, not the culture or society, not the riches, it is not the human or what is of this world' (Makkai 1931:359).

Makkai defined the mission of the church in a certain way. He related mission to the essence of the church but for the formulation of it he did not draw from dialectical theology. As the champion of self-conscious Calvinism, he considered that confessional identity is the major aspect that needs to be strengthened.

Dialectical theologians in Transylvania did not shut themselves off from cultural, political and social roles. Lajos Imre considered that it is the life-interest of the church to preach the Word purely. In this activity the church is helped by theology. But theology also looks for the basis from which the socio-cultural activity of the church can be done (Imre 1936:498).

b. Charity, as the Mission of the Church

Dániel Borbáth, being a director of an alms house, was interested in practical theology, dealt with the theological foundation of Christian charity work. Borbáth welcomed the new changes in theology that brought a more careful definition of the church. In the past, says Borbáth with liberal theology in mind, the church was regarded as 'a religious-ethical association called into being by the demand of those who cultivate religious and moral life' (Borbáth 1932:2). Borbáth abandoned this liberal concept and wanted to define the church by means of the words of Heidelberg Catechism, according to which the church is 'God's multitude called out of all nations of the world through his Holy Spirit and his Word' (question 54). Charity work is part of the mission of this church, thinks Borbáth. The most important question he is interested in is whether charity work done by the Reformed church differs from charity work done by other churches and social agencies.

The charity work of social agencies has a humanistic basis, says Borbáth. Their work is to be appreciated, but they cannot give answers to the questions of suffering and about great issues of life. Alternatively we would expect Borbáth to say that Christian charity work has to be placed on the foundation of the Word of God but he does not explicitly state this. Christian charity work, says Borbáth, first of all differs from a humanistic one in that the life of the person who performs it is greatly affected by the fact that he is part of God's covenant of grace and looks at life from God's perspective. 'This person, on the one hand knows the answer of revelation to life's principal questions and on the other hand he, too, has experienced God's charity; this is the reason why he became a charity worker' (Borbáth 1932:6). Borbáth is not quite clear what is the role of the Word in charity work, but it seems that he refers to the loving way a person affected by the Word is able to relate to the needy: 'he regards them as God's children with whom he spends an eternity and the hope of this eternal fellowship already determines his relation to them' (Borbáth 1932:6). Borbáth however does not say anything different from what could have been said equally well from other theological positions. The only hint to a theology of the Word is that he regards charity work as being not only for alleviation of suffering, but mainly as the preaching of the Word: the work of charity is a testimony about revelation.

c. Home and Foreign Mission

The revival of the interest in home and foreign mission in Transylvania happened in the 1930s. This decade, however, is only the beginning of the production of literature about this matter. Until 1936, in the process of reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania the analytic work about how the specific concept of revelation and the Word of God impacts on the theory of mission had not yet happened. The revival of the interest in mission stands, moreover, only partly under the influence of the reception of

dialectical theology, as it was done under the influence of the confessional-Calvinist movement, already present in the Transylvanian Reformed church life (see II.C.4). At the same time we should not forget the former mission activities done by the Hungarian Reformed in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century that served as a root for the renewed interest (see Kool 1993). The first writings about the theological basis of mission in the new period appeared in 1924 in the columns of *Az Út* magazine. The interest in foreign mission however came to life only ten years later, after the first attempts to apply dialectical theology in different areas of theology. First the discussion turned on home mission, since home mission initiatives had been an issue for some years.

According to Gönczy home mission is a task because we do not face the church in its ideal existence: in the ideal state of the church there is no home mission needed and mission is only foreign mission (Gönczy 1924:10). Home mission is needed in the measure as the church drifts away from Christ. In this understanding, home mission is a self-sustaining function of the church. Gönczy did not therefore come to an understanding of what home mission really consisted of. He links home mission to the participation of people at church services: 'What is the value of the preaching, pastoral care, catechism and administration for those who do not attend church, for those whom we even do not know', he asked (Gönczy 1924:11). He warns his readers that the church should provide specialised services to reach these people. He however, states that home mission must be done by the church, since it is that activity of the church by which it is looking for the lost.

In Gönczy's approach, besides the method of mission, there is a dose of theological uncertainty in connection with the church. How can one still be considered a church member if he is outside of the body of the church and is regarded as 'lost' by Gönczy? But if the 'lost' here does not mean 'unbeliever', what Gönczy called home

mission is in fact pastoral care. If it means unbeliever, home mission is rather evangelism. Tavaszy realised this inconsistency when he declared that home mission is in fact *cura pastoralis*, with the exception, that it can also be done by others than 'qualified pastors' (Tavaszy 1924c:13). This is why Tavaszy thinks that the method of home mission is 'personal visitation' and its institutional methods are Sunday school, bible study groups, family devotions and conferences. It is clear that the target groups of home mission in Tavaszy's conception are not the same as in Gönczy's. Gönczy thinks more about outreach and Tavaszy more about building of the church since his method can be applied to those who are in the circle of influence of the church, and even to those who are its most faithful members. According to Tavaszy,

the novelty in the concept of home mission is that according to the differentiated social life, the alienated, indifferent, cold and the somnolent *church members* must be won by more differentiated activities and works, and the spiritual life of those who are faithful *members of the church* must be continuously deepened (Tavaszy 1924c:13 italics added).

Ten years later, in 1935, Lajos Imre emphasises the importance of preaching in mission: mission work is preaching, and the commissioner of it is the church. For him mission is preaching to a special target group – those people who are elected by God. Home and foreign mission, thinks Imre, are not determined by geographical separation – since we are not to differentiate between the elect close to us and the elect far from us. Foreign mission is to preach the gospel among non-Christians, home mission is preaching to those who are in the range of the church (Imre 1935:6).

The impact of dialectical theology on theology of mission, as understood by Imre, is felt only in the fact that mission is articulated through the concept of preaching. The aim of mission cannot be cultural, imperial, commercial and industrial, but only 'to make known the salvation of Christ to all nations'. Preaching makes mission and stands in the centre of it – we are told. Preaching however is not only saying words, but also an

involvement with the life of the people. Mission can be interested in 'the culture of respective nations, the rise of their level of education or betterment of their situation through industry and trade' (Imre 1935:7). Despite this amelioration we think that the concept of mission as preaching allows only an one-way communication. The preacher has the message and the listeners are the recipients. It seems that a Barthian understanding of the theology of the Word and his rejection of natural theology and *analogia entis* would not permit another understanding.

A serious reflection on mission in the light of dialectical theology in Transylvania reveals the need for ecclesiological clarification in the conception of home mission; as a consequence of re-thinking of the nature of the church a different conclusion might be drawn as far as the centrality of revelation in dialectical theology is concerned. At the same time the anthropology of dialectical theology was not wholly considered for what mission is and how it works. Issues related to home and foreign mission were difficult to clarify from a 'people's church' position and the full implications of Barth's ideas about what it means to hear the Word could not be seriously considered.

5. Pastoral Care in the Church

In the previous section we saw the uncertainty about the definition of home mission. Tavaszy thought that the personal method of home mission is in fact pastoral care done by all committed Christians. This view would open up for a home mission movement with a large base on the grass root level. Such a hope however was not realised.

Lajos Imre considers pastoral care an activity in its own right as the task of the church to bring the Word close to the individuals and to be of help to them (Imre 1929b). According to Imre pastoral care is preaching and mission at the same time and is needed by the individual believer, by the congregation and by the whole church. Imre

saw the issue of pastoral care as being wholly Word-centred. Pastoral care is interested only in one question – says Imre: the relationship between God and the Christian.

This is also the central issue in Christian life and preaching in the church. Imre parallels preaching and pastoral care. The role of the Holy Spirit is decisive in pastoral care as it is in preaching, since in relation with God ‘no man can work on the soul’ in his relation to God. The problem with past theological trends was that they ignored this fact and the aim of individual pastoral care became obscure – said Imre. Humanistic goals like the development of personality, the practices of a pious life, the pursuit for avoiding bad influences are to be totally abandoned (Imre 1929b:13). In order to avoid a humanistic approach to pastoral work Imre names the Holy Spirit as the subject of it, who nurtures the believers through the Word. Human carers are only the means of pastoral care – as the preacher is in preaching. Those who care in this way humbly recognise that they are that ‘priestly type people’ who can not give ‘definitive answers to everyone in every aspect of religion and Christian life, and they are not able to solve all problems’ (Imre 1929b:13). They rather regard themselves as fragile instruments of the Holy Spirit, since they can speak only about what has been revealed to them.

Thus Imre arrives to the definition of pastoral care: ‘nothing else than preaching the revealed will of God to the individual souls in order that they might see it, understand it and be obedient to it’ (Imre 1929b:14). Imre does not seem concerned, that the system outlined by him leads to a directive counselling which has its pitfalls. He only says that the Holy Spirit does not get sufficient emphasis on the subject of counselling. But, Imre does not take seriously the object of counselling, the human spirit, that needs to be looked at not only in his fallen condition, but in his redeemed state as well. In his opinion the counsellor is not an instrument of pastoral care that helps his brother, with whom he has the same faith, both being the children of the same

Father in hearing the Word of God, but he is rather a mirror-holder to show the other where he has been disobedient to the Word.

Imre as a matter of fact is consistent with the possibilities given by dialectical theology – as he interprets it. In Imre's anthropology man is vindicated by God, as 'one who has no independent existence apart from God's, or outside God', where man is 'struggling with sin and wriggles under the burden of sin' and is a 'miserable slave, a tragic being, bearing the stamp of death on himself'. The best this man can achieve is to thirst after God (Imre 1929b:18-21). Such a view of man makes possible no other method but that of direct confrontation. Imre laying such a theological foundation for pastoral counselling, does not seem to know about the joy of the saved man who, if he were to fall seven times he will rise up, because the Lord is his help (Micah 7:8). Imre recognises that pastoral care 'mediates commandments, since it tells what God commands in that very situation to that very person, what is the answer of the Word to his doubts' (Imre 1929b:26). In the transmission of commands Imre sees a guarantee for the counsellor to avoid becoming a dictator. Since this is a real possibility the counsellor needs to look for himself for the will of God and obey it; he also needs to feed himself on what he feeds others. Imre realises the danger of directive counselling and for this reason he asks the counsellor to help the 'souls to learn how to become strong, and how he himself can advance in his own spiritual life' (Imre 1929b:27) in order to find out God's will for himself and learn to build up his own spiritual life. Here, however, Imre reached the border of the possibilities given by dialectical theology as it was understood in Transylvania. He used its Word-centrality and at the same time he struggled to set the Christian more positively in his possibilities of developing towards maturity in his life communion with the Spirit (Imre 1929b:28-29).

E. The Word of God and Culture

We have seen in section VI.B.2.f that Tavaszy held an idealistic view of culture that was not entirely influenced by Barth's theology of the Word. He held an elitist view on culture and defined it in terms of 'being cultured'. For Tavaszy cultural life was 'the lordship of the spirit over the brute natural' (Tavaszy 1929a:54) and the mission of the Reformed church was defined to facilitate this lordship.

Gyula Dávid made a special scrutiny of the issue of culture in the light of dialectical theology. He brought out with a more existentialist view of culture and tried to articulate a theology of culture that is compatible with dialectical theology. Dávid starts from a general concept of culture according to which culture is 'the struggle for physical and spiritual existence' (Dávid 1930:212); it is not a neutral idea but a value-concept. Gyula Dávid links the issue of culture to that of minority existence in Transylvania. He argues that culture in Transylvania always had a role to protect and preserve the Hungarian minority. As we have seen also in Makkai's case, the Reformed church considered that its task is to foster the minority culture (see IV.B). In this sense, as in Tavaszy's view, 'cultural life' is the equivalent of 'cultured life'. In reference to this context Dávid said: 'If culture is the struggle for existence, that this thesis is true: our culture is sentenced to death' (Dávid 1930:212). This exasperation about the Hungarian destiny is felt not only between the lines his essay, but also in the arena of social life, where many reformed personalities were engaged.⁷ Dávid hit the same chord as Makkai when, making allusion to the restrictive nature of the actual minority

⁷ Makkai was also a writer who wrote on themes from the history of Transylvania. Tavaszy's literary activity is also socially important. In 1924 Tavaszy was among the founders of the *Transylvanian Helikon*, a writers' organisation and regularly published short pieces in their magazine. He also supported another writer-group the *Páztortűz-Cirle* and was in close relationship with its leader, the poet Sándor Reményik. His interest in general education of the people is shown by the zeal in reorganising the *Transylvanian General Education Association for Hungarians* of which he became a member, and for a time its vice-president.

situation, he said: 'when we fight for our existence, we also fight for our nation and for our culture. The battlefield of our fight is the church: our frightened existence took a refuge behind the walls of the church' (Dávid 1930:212). This fact is a blessing and temptation at the same time, confessed Dávid. He can see very well that in modern Protestantism the end of cultural-Protestantism has come. For this reason it is necessary to clarify the issue of culture inside the boundaries set by dialectical theology, and so much more as dialectical theology 'breaks a path in Transylvania' and is charged with anti-culturalism. If this were true, it would create a dangerous situation for Transylvania. But for Dávid, 'to accuse dialectical theology of being anti-cultural, means that the accusers do not speak about true culture and about true dialectical theology' (Dávid 1930:214).

Dávid is convinced that nobody valued true culture more highly than dialectical theology. But what is culture? – he asks. In Barth's footpaths, Dávid says that 'somebody might want to speak about culture as being civilisation, or as idealism did, as the ideal of the final things that determine human action. For us, however, such a starting point is something negative leading to polemics' (Dávid 1930:215).⁸ Dávid starts from Barth's definition of culture in his article of 1926 and interprets the concept; 'culture is the task proposed by the Word of God to accomplish man's destiny in his physical and spiritual unity' (Dávid 1930:215, and Barth 1962[1928]:337). The issue of culture, recognises Dávid, is the issue of the *ideal man*. But the difference dialectical theology makes is that it takes this ideal not from human endeavours and human possibilities, but from the Word.

Dávid, then, regarded the anthropological question, 'the problem of true humanity', as defined by dialectical theology, to be the most important in the issue of

⁸ Dávid refers to Karl Barth *Die Kirche und die Kultur*, Zw. D. Z. 1926. p. 366

culture (Dávid 1930:218). He says more than Tavaszy had said up to this point since, when he spoke about the 'concept of nationhood' he omitted to talk about the issue of sin and considered the 'demotic forces' such as 'the knowledge and respect for values' in the spirit of the people (Tavaszy 1924d:80). Since the issue of culture in dialectical theology is determined by the anthropological question, Dávid argues that the crisis of culture and religion becomes visible when God's way is opposite to man's. Barth's seeming anti-cultural attitude – admits Dávid – results from the idea that every earthly thing is under the judgement of sin: 'since culture and cultural values are inseparable from man, as we know them, as we ourselves are' (Dávid 1930:220). Dávid thinks that a new era has come for the way one is to relate to cultural issues: 'After the serious consideration of the reality of sin the time of building and sustaining the world through idealistic and romantic demands, and through communicating cultural values has definitively gone' (Dávid 1930:221). The way out of the cultural crisis is marked by three elements of one and only one remedy, as Dávid quotes Barth and Gogarten: forgiveness, faith and obedience to God. In this way Dávid reached the point where cultural work is in fact preaching the Word to the world to confront the human situation and to bringing everything into the obedience to the Lord. At the same time he recognises that this aim is not achievable in the boundaries of the present age, but God will accomplish it in the eschaton. Here is Dávid's conclusion:

When a culture reckons with the fact that behind the impossibilities of earthly attempts there is the final word: *Ich mache alles neu*, only then it becomes the exhibitor of new life. The eschatological outlook is both a consolation and a rebuke that what God has promised he will accomplish. At the same time it is a command and a compulsion, towards the salvation of this world viciously threatened by sin (Dávid 1930:224).

We have seen that Dávid followed Barth, Gogarten and Thurneysen in putting forward his views on culture. He popularized the teachings of dialectical theology without asking deeper questions one might have done about its validity. In my view,

however his attempt had a positive contribution towards the elimination of extremist positions from among the Hungarian Reformed in Transylvania. A concept of culture such as dialectical theology put forward when mingled with the spirit of Transylvanianism, had a significant healing effect, and not only for the situation in which Hungarians were becoming a minority in the newly established Romanian national state; it also contributed to the peaceful cohabitation of nations in the Balkans, ill-famed for their national and cultural intolerance. This was the case because although Dávid recognised that culture is a 'struggle for physical and spiritual existence', a desire to accomplish the ideal man, he wanted to take this ideal from the Word of God. Where each nation or cultural group is looking for the Word of God the tensions and conflicts are eased, since according to dialectical theology in Dávid's reading the way out of crisis is the way of forgiveness, faith and obedience to the Word of God. Thus the Word of God can both criticise and guide culture. Four years after his 1930 essay Dávid is even more explicit about the connection between the Word of God and cultural work.

The determinant factor of human life is God. If somebody deals with the issues of human life, to help men towards a more human life, in other words if that person does cultural work, the basis of this kind of work can only be God's Word, since the problems of life cannot be solved without God (Dávid 1934b:178).

In these terms, as we have already hinted, cultural work is another expression for mission. If, however, cultural work is regarded as a mission to proclaim the Word of God, that indeed precludes and releases the tensions that may appear between nations and social groups. In my understanding dialectical theology prepared Dávid to promote such a view of culture that also determined his position on the issues of nationalism and relation to the state. 'Since the Lord God is above the nations, only repenting and obedient nations have a future and nobody can take this future from them'. 'The state is a necessity, but God has given a legal order for the peaceful and human coexistence of people. Consequently the state can serve the church in facilitating the preaching of the

gospel. The paramount interest of the state is the existence of a church that proclaims a pure gospel' (Dávid 1934b:180). The value of these statements can be fully appreciated only against the cultural and social background of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania of the 1920s and 1930s as I outlined it in section II.A.1.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARACTERISTICS OF KARL BARTH'S RECEPTION IN TRANSYLVANIA

A. Partial and Critical Reception

We have seen in the last two chapters that the reception of Barth's dialectical theology in Transylvania was only accomplished partially. This means on the one hand that the whole development of Barth, the theologian on the move, was not followed entirely and on the other hand that not all the doctrines developed by Barth were accepted. As we have seen basically the doctrine of the Word of God as revelation was taken on board. Very soon, however, after Tavaszy had laid down the theoretical framework of the reception and critically evaluated liberal theology, a certain working out of the doctrine of the Word of God was begun, to bring 'under the predicament of revelation' the other doctrines of Christian theology. This attempt was made basically in the practical issues of preaching, teaching and the mission of the church, with some consideration of culture and nationality, without overlooking the issue of exegesis that closely related to scripture interpretation.

At the same time we have seen a certain shift in philosophical allegiance of the Transylvanian theological scene. The first generation of dialectical theologians, that was grown on the soil of value philosophy, a Transylvanian version of neo-Kantianism, shifted interest towards existential theology. Tavaszy was most interested in philosophy, but his theological program determined his interest in philosophy. As I have shown in

section VI.C.2 Tavaszy turned to existentialism under the influence of dialectical theology and he did it in the measure dialectical theology would allow it.

The reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania was neither unanimous nor uncritical. I mentioned Makkai as the main exponent of the model which regarded dialectical theology as a mere correction of the dominant theological trend, and which rejected dialectical theology on the basis that the Calvinist renewal of the early twentieth century in Transylvania made it redundant.

In the critical evaluation of dialectical theology I have dealt with three theologians who made significant contributions towards our issue: Sándor Tavaszy, Géza Nagy and Béla Tankó. Tavaszy's critique in fact was not a negative; he defended dialectical theology from imagined attacks. Nagy, to whom I linked the reception model emphasising the connectedness of dialectical theology with earlier trends, rejected certain aspects of dialectical theology, but as a whole he considered it a necessary development. Tankó, however, criticising from the point of view of the philosophy of religion, rejected dialectical theology as a valid theological thinking. The following major issues were raised.

1. Philosophical Premises in Theology

Nagy thinks that Barth's passionate protest against theology working with philosophical premises is not founded and is only a temporal phenomenon. Nagy does not approve the excesses of philosophy of religion, but they should be seen in the attempt of theology to find itself in the organism of the sciences. This desire can be realised only with an exercise in the critique of the human spirit. Without this, sometimes risky endeavour, science simply cannot exist. But Barth himself, says Nagy, even while being against theological prolegomena and philosophy of religion, makes an extensive criticism of the cultural and ethical life of his age. Nagy thinks that Barth's disciples, without naming

any, go even further and state that the theme of theology and the essence of philosophy are the same, since both attempt to search the issue of origins. So, besides transcendental theology – argues Nagy – transcendental philosophy is also present. 'Christian theology, after coming to know itself needs to look for building relationships with philosophy, if it does not want to remain an isolated discipline', says Géza Nagy (1930:598) and thinks that Barth's protest against philosophical premises in theology will be short-lived.

2. The Otherness of God

Tankó criticises Barth's concept of God and wonders why he enquires so hopefully into a supposed relationship between God and man that would be impossible without divine intervention. Tankó thinks that in Barth's theology the concept of the divine sonship of human beings is entirely missing, a concept which otherwise is a solid gospel truth. He thinks that from Barth's rigid system one must escape to a more decisive forum like the gospels, religious experience and history. Tankó judges that the *either-or* of Barth is misplaced since 'it is not true that there is *either* a total transcendence *or* there is no God at all'. 'Religious experiences from both the Old and New Testament' – says Tankó – 'are equally aware of the magnificent thought of createdness in God's image, and this thought had been so familiar to the people of Jesus' time, that Paul referred to it as to the treasure of the common religious conciseness' (Acts 17:28; Tankó 1931:266).

Tankó rejects any dualism in which God and the world would exist equally alongside each other, and thinks that in the view of dialectical theology a consideration of the immanence of God would lead to this idea. Even more, considering the world and God as two realities standing side by side would lead to the elevation of the world over against God and making God *only* immanent in the world (Tankó 1931:267).

Tavaszy, anticipating complaints like Tankó's, rejects the charge of dualism which might be laid against dialectical theology itself. This charge, and the critique built on it, is not theological but philosophical in nature, asserts Tavaszy. The charge of dualism cannot be applied to dialectical theology since the emphasis on the sovereignty of God results in doing away with all imaginable dualism. The aim of dialectic, says Tavaszy, is to prevent God being ranked with man or any human thought. Furthermore – says Tavaszy – the contraposition of man and God does not mean the disengagement of God and man, but only their 'very clear-cut differentiation'. This differentiation, however, is an incentive for the religious man to 'cast on him his trust and hope, resulting from his faith' (Tavaszy 1929a:58).

3. Personalism in Religion

In the context of comparing Barth's theology with philosophy of religion, Nagy criticises Barth for under-stating the personal element in religion, especially in Protestantism. By 'personal' Nagy understands the subjective human element and activity in the religious experience. In the history of Christianity, alongside the dogmatic clarification of revelation, argued Nagy, the desire that dogmatic truths should become part of personal life has always been present. We see this happening in the lives of outstanding personalities who by their experience with God renewed their Christian denominations.

The difference between the newest theology [liberal theology] and scholasticism on the one hand, and enlightened or non-enlightened orthodoxy on the other hand is that the former puts personal Christianity – sometimes excessively – back into its primal rights, forgotten from the time of Reformation, but stressed again by pietism (Nagy G 1930:598).

Nagy observes an alleged correction made by Barth in his *Christian Dogmatics* vis-à-vis his earlier thought, that he should have reduced the absolute opposition

between God's Word and piety to make room for a more personal encounter with God. He was only protesting, said Nagy, against making piety the *principle* of the knowledge of God. Nagy founds this debatable comment on his observation that Barth speaks about the subjective side of revelation, which includes our response as free and responsible agents who think the Word after God. This 'thinking after' is done by the pious, the personal and active factor in the experience of God. Nagy thinks that by this Barth breaks the framework of absolute opposition between God and men. He also makes an overstatement when he affirms that by this introduction of the subjective element in Barth, in fact, allows man to become the *starting point* of his *Dogmatics*.¹ Nevertheless, in Nagy's view, the personal factor is not strong enough to counterbalance the other sides of his theology, so Barth's theology has been accused of being heartless, icy, like any extreme orthodoxy, and of being an intellectual faith-monstrosity (Nagy G 1930:598).

In Nagy's opinion Barth is not the first who realised the importance of personalism in theology, since it was an important aspect of Schleiermacher's, and Ritschl's theology. The difference between these theologians and Barth is that he considered revelation to be the 'only and authoritative headspring of Christian consciousness' (Nagy G 1930:599). The vindication of this 'old principle' in the context of dialectical theology, however, is not without any cost to pay. Nagy echoes Harnack's attack on Barth that he 'overshadows the functions of human consciousness and mind, cuts off the relationship between theology, critical philosophy and history and turns the theology faculty [at the university] into a pulpit' (Nagy G 1930:599).² Nagy concludes in connection with Barth:

¹ Nagy quotes Karl Barth, *Dogmatik*, Munchen: Chr. Kaiser, 1927, pp. 430, 431, 438.

² Nagy refers to *Die Chr. Welt* 1923, 8, p. 142.

We maintain the truth that the epistemological principle of theology, which also determines its method, is revelation alone. But for the sake of a trustworthy rendering of the reality created by God, we consider that it is necessary that theology should consider seriously the factors of moral sciences and establish their relative value with seriousness and accuracy (Nagy G 1930:599).

As a matter of fact it seems that Nagy did not understand the personalism in Barth's theology. Barth did not deny personalism in theology, as Nagy himself recognises, but he understood it in his own way. He considered that the view according to which the conditions for personal encounter with God are somehow given in the structure of human nature is mistaken. Barth rejected the idea 'that in the depths of human self-consciousness or human moral experience, God was somehow waiting to be discovered and encountered' (Hunsinger 1991:40). Barth refused such understanding of personalism, says Hunsinger, in order to maintain the lordship of Jesus Christ and to prevent humans usurping 'the centre which rightfully belongs to him'. Barth re-conceptualised personalism and considered it mediated by the objective presence of Jesus Christ. Personal encounter with God is a free gift of God and as Hunsinger argued its possibility is 'extrinsic, not intrinsic, to human nature'. This reinterpretation of personalism, however, would have not been attractive to Nagy, who gave a more significant role to human activity than Barth would be ready to consider.

4. The Use of Dialectical Method

Tankó thinks that the paradoxical concepts that Barth uses 'lack their illuminating content, and their constructive exposition is missing'. The firework of paradoxes dazzles the eyes, but behind the glittering, in fact a *sacrificium intellectus* is required of man under the title 'theology' claiming that reason would not understand it any way (Tankó 1931:263).

Nagy approaches the evaluation of the dialectical method from his point of view of an alleged lack of personal element in dialectical theology. He says that if the

enforcement of a personal element is lacking from a theological system and if theology relies almost entirely on the revelation of a mysterious God, then rendering its content into an organic whole is difficult or impossible. Barth intended to use dialectical method as a means of achieving the much-needed unity, says Nagy, and here he thinks that Barth is not entirely original, since the great souls of Christianity, like Augustine, Luther and Pascal already observed the impossibility of the mind to accommodate God's revelation; it is possible to speak about it only in antinomies. But the recourse to antinomies does not absolve theology from the requirement of systematic theologising (Nagy G 1930:600). A systematic presentation of Christian faith is the presupposition of a scholarly approach, but the contradictions between the concepts of dialectical theology threaten the theological system. Oscillating paradoxes can be part of practical life, can be present in personal conversations – says Nagy – but where we desire to teach, there we need to make order, not only among statements, but also among the forms of their exposition. Otherwise the Reformed identity is in danger:

We need to know whether God's turning to us is revelation or rather his mysteriousness (*Verborgenheit*); whether our relationship with Him is our calling, or rather our abandonment, whether it is heteronomy or autonomy; otherwise we cannot be sure whether we are Protestants any more (Nagy G 1930:600).

Calvinism, even apart from the doctrine of predestination, says Nagy, has always been characterised by unanimity of thinking. Nagy thinks that the dialectical method in Barth is a penetration of a negative effect from Lutheranism via Kierkegaard, and the otherwise serious theological standpoint represented by Barth asks for its urgent elimination. According to Nagy the Hungarian theologian must learn dialectic not from the sophists, but from Plato and Socrates where the dialectical tension between the parts is always released at the end of the dialogue. Nagy urges the theologians to be faithful to the task, set forth in the Scripture and by Calvin, to labour for a precise formulation,

which is needed for making God's revelation conscious, in Christian teaching and education (Nagy G 1930:600).

Both Tankó and Nagy criticised Barth's dialectical method from a rationalistic point of view, holding a belief in the possibility of the human mind grasping the whole reality and ordering it into a system of thought; here they evidence of modern thinking. Nagy even linked the Reformed identity to this modern approach. At the same time Nagy observed the difficulty that a theology using the dialectical method had in appropriating a coherent theory of education, a factor that other Hungarian theologians seemed not to realise (Nagy G 1930:600).

5. Reason and Faith

Nagy thinks that Barth's idea of revelation surpasses our rationality and range of emotion. He joins Harnack in his critique of Barth on the issue of the place of the function of mind and human consciousness. When these functions are not considered seriously enough, theology is cut off from its contact with critical philosophy and history. Nagy agrees with Barth in making the idea of revelation the determining factor of theology, but he desires a more systematic consideration of moral disciplines (humanities) by theological investigation. Otherwise a serious approach to science and to responsible education is not possible. Nagy does not accept the idea of an intermittent experience of God's revelation and his knowledge, since this would deprive the Christian of his assurance of saying 'Abba, Father' (Romans 8:15). Between experiences of revelation and encounter, the role of mind to reflect on them and build up a believing consciousness is indispensable for Christian life.

Let us recognise this truth in Barth, that God and his Word is indeed greater than us, and if we are to receive something of it we cannot boast the whole possession of it. We, however, emphasise, that precisely the growth, the building up [of the believing consciousness] preconditions the rootedness and the grounding [of the believer],

without which Reformed life and doctrine becomes uncertain, or at best it will be a system of thought with intellectual and moral colouring (Nagy G 1930:599).

Tankó, too, opposes the reciprocal exclusion of faith and reason, 'the greatest among the oppositions' in Barth's theology, he thinks (Tankó 1931:267). These two functions are the most important in the forming and understanding of experience, and on them depends the direction and outcome of the inward interpretation of experience. To oppose these two functions would be equal to a psychological impossibility; only a faulty understanding can separate the two. This separation urges also the false idea that God is entirely other. Tankó labels Brunner's thesis that 'faith can be known only by faith' as the 'escape of reason from itself'. He argues from the indivisibility of the knowing person for the unity of faith and reason:

Faith in reality 'knows nothing'; that which *knows* is the same intelligence that believes; in faith the same intelligence experiences an immediate certainty, understanding immediately its meaning and its sense, since this is its own life act, it is itself. Faith does not understand anything, but the believing intelligence understands itself, of course as far as knowledge is possible (Tankó 1931:267).

Tankó concludes that it is not true that theology is the act of *either-or* decision. Decision is the business of the will, and science has the privilege of illuminating the will. There is nothing to hope from the type of science dialectical theology represents. Tankó strikes a warning chord saying: 'What will be the practical consequence of all this we only can guess. It is not likely to cause a strong evangelical Protestant renewal, nay, I'm afraid it will become the manifestation of some kind of magical miracle-waiting spiritualism' (Tankó 1931:269).

6. Scientific Method

Tankó makes an evaluation of dialectical theology from a rational positivistic view of science from which theology seems to speak about unreasonable things, and man is asked to accept impossibilities for reason and throw himself in the arms of

incomprehensibility. According to Tankó, this is a revived orthodoxy, not even worthy of the name of theology (Tankó 1931:267f.). What Barth does is not the replacing of one theological trend by another, but rather the replacing of scientific work in theology with the impossibility of science. Such thinking, which departs from the tasks of living are not of any use, declares Tankó. Since, however the demand of a scientific method cannot be rejected, Barth's theology attempts to find it in Kierkegaard. Tankó admits Kierkegaard's historical importance in an age when the settled Protestantism eradicated every paradox from its life. Kierkegaard's 'psychological and artistic effect', however 'is not in proportion with his methodical and scientific justification' (Tankó 1931:265). Tankó thinks that Kierkegaard was not able to rise above his own doubts and spiritual flurry, to justify theoretically and to present scientifically what he felt. His dialectic is only formal, but its essence is only the antithesis of the opposites – it misses exactly that which would have made it dialectical: the synthesis. Since reason did not complete its work of thinking through this type of dialectic the *either-or* opposition might not even be justified. Thus Leisegang is right, says Tankó, when he labels Kierkegaard's thinking a 'ludicrous puppet' (Tankó 1931:266). In Barth's theology 'the same barren dialectic is present from which theoretically there is no way out'. The basis of all dialectical oppositions in Barth's theology, says Tankó is that God is so different from the world, man and history that he is even their opposite – there is no relation between them, only opposition.

Tankó, as we mentioned above, has a rational positivistic view of science. He did not make the journey from one concept of science to another as Tavaszy did (see VI.A.3.b) in finding a new 'scientific character' for theology after the challenge of liberal theology by dialectical theology. As a matter of fact Tankó rejected this challenge in the name of a solid view of science.

B. Reception from a Calvinistic Standpoint

The esteem of Calvin and the reconsideration of his theology and its implications in church life had begun before the reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania and it was going on parallel with the reception. We have seen in Chapter IV that the claim that Barth is consistent with Calvin is only partly true and cannot be held without necessary modifications.

A short writing from Barth appeared in a Hungarian magazine in Debrecen in which Barth cooled down the enthusiasm for simply imitating Calvin (Barth 1928). A true Calvinist, he asserted, is one who takes Calvin's position of being obedient to the Word of God. 'We should not lose our time' – said Barth – 'with the veneration or imitation of Calvin. There is no need today for his piety, but for the men of our generation to be the *men of the beginnings*, as our ancestors were' (Barth 1928:375).

Hungarian theologians in Transylvania tried to move within the Calvinistic tradition and relate the reception of dialectical theology to their Calvinistic theological heritage. Christian doctrines like anthropology, ecclesiology, and more practical issues like preaching, mission and education were developed in such a way that they might be characteristically Calvinistic and also respect the church's historical confessions. Dialectical theology provided means for criticizing former liberalism generally and especially the study of religion in order to bring the church back to its Calvinistic roots. We observed that theologians in favour of dialectical theology followed Tavaszy's approach. Tavaszy can be considered the main theoretician of the reception and his colleagues followed in his footsteps concentrating on certain practical areas in the light of what Tavaszy said. This is not to deny creativity from theologians like Borbáth, Imre, Maksay, Dávid, but only to say that these men did not bring out fundamentally new ideas compared to Tavaszy.

In his attempt at popularising dialectical theology, Tavaszy observed that most of the objections to dialectical theology raised the question of whether it is compatible with Calvinism. For this reason he wanted to clarify the relationship of dialectical theology to Calvin and find the basic Reformed features in it.

Tavaszy, like Barth himself, argued that a slavish imitation of Calvin is not beneficial and is not even possible since between Calvin and contemporary theology lies the whole history of Enlightenment, nineteenth century theological liberalism, relativism and evolutionism. 'Today we enquire differently from the way Calvin did, consequently we respond differently from how Calvin responded. We need to struggle against different latent attacks and need to reject different latent errors than Calvin' (Tavaszy 1929a:47). Tavaszy also rejects that kind of Calvinist theology that works only with quotations taken from Calvin. He says:

today we need the whole Calvin and not a disassembled Calvin ... dialectical theology is truly Calvinist because through it Calvin does not bind us but liberates us ... because it reveals those forces, truths and aspects by means of which Calvin was able to accomplish the Reformation (Tavaszy 1929a:47).

Thus Tavaszy thought that in the spirit of Calvin new answers have to be given to contemporary issues. As we have seen in Chapter VI Tavaszy applied this principle only partly in his theological construction. In his prolegomena to dogmatics he drew on dialectical theology without ever saying more or something different than what would fit comfortably inside the boundaries of confessional Calvinism.

C. Reception with a Priority for Practical Issues

The reception of dialectical theology in Transylvania tended towards practical issues. Sándor Tavaszy was less practical among the theologians since his main focus was the presentation and the theoretical clarification of dialectical theology.

Very early in Transylvania the work of theologians targeted the implication of dialectical theology for practical issues of church life. So, dialectical theology was an incentive not for an academic but for mainly practical theology. With such a promising perspective one could hope that it would play an important role in the renewal of the Hungarian reformed church in Transylvania. Certainly this was in mind of Aladár Gáncs who evaluated Barth's influence from this perspective (Gáncs 1930:563, see II.C.3).

For Gáncs Barth was a *prophet*, who dared to begin a search to find the truth, a way out from the century long crisis which had settled upon church life and theology from the time of rationalism and pietism. Barth today is the man, says Gáncs, against or for whom everybody needs to take a position. Gáncs (1930:564) summarises Barth's impact under three headings: (1) He is able to grasp those who are not interested in the matters of faith with his extraordinary love for truth. 'For Barth one gram of truth is more valuable than 100 000 kg glaze'. (2) By suspecting every subjectivism Barth fascinates many who have become disgusted by the excesses of subjectivism. He places on an objective ground all kinds of manifestations of Christian life. (3) Barth does not declare himself, or his theology to be completed. There is always space for deeper understanding, and later adjustments and re-evaluations.

As far as the content of Barth's theology is concerned Gáncs grasps only aspects which are related to Christian life and have practical implications. First Gáncs mentions that Barth teaches that we should not consider ourselves important persons, since all we are is due to God's grace. Our Christian life can remain on a biblical basis only as far as we depart from self-importance (Gáncs 1930:565). If we concentrate more on the human person God uses to bring his Word to us and not on the Word, this attitude will stop us from hearing the Word, since we will be blinded by his importance or even by his insignificance. Barth's theology will produce revival, if he is followed in this aspect.

Gáncs also learns from Barth the need to give priority to the Word of the Lord. He delights in Barth's discovery that theology can be based only on what God has said. Barth has separated the human and divine, that is the 'entirely other'. We face this 'entirely other' as the Word of God and incarnated Christ. The Bible is the Word of God since in it we meet most clearly and powerfully this 'Das ganz Andere' which he put at the centre of his theology (Gáncs 1930:568). The Bible's goal is not to teach us how to talk to God, but how to listen to God speaking to us. In the Bible we read that which addresses somebody, the one who eventually sits in front of the Bible with his misery and sins. The Bible teaches us to give priority to the Word of God against prayer. It is more important what God tells us than what we tell him. Our speaking to God should always be a response to what God already has spoken to us. Gáncs admits that Barth's theology teaches the church to give priority to the word against pious feelings, too. 'It is a very good thought', says Gáncs 'that as far as the pietistic circles are concerned, they can easily accept the whole truth that he rightly emphasised in this respect' (Gáncs 1930:569).

Gáncs thinks that Barth's theology is very suitable for preparing the churches for revival due to his *characteristic anthropology*. In Barth human beings are totally lost and wholly in need of relying on God's grace. Perdition and corruption is a state which effects the pious also. Gáncs quotes Barth: the *ego* is not so suspect, deceptive, stubborn, daring and repulsive in any of its forms than when it is covered by the robe of piety (Gáncs 1930:571).

Gáncs also appreciates Barth's notion of *objective faith*. Barth objectifies faith by separating it from human reason and also from human experience and feelings, says Gáncs. He investigates the way in which this concept of faith influences Christian life, but he does not immerse us in theological investigations. 'Our Barth', says Gáncs, 'observed that faith has a risk factor built in it', in order to avoid making it too

comfortable (Gáncs 1930:573). There is not a single piece of ground where faith could rest its feet, where our sinful being could anchor. But faith is suitable for jumping away from human self-confidence in order to rely on God. From Barth, concludes Gáncs, we all learn how to live an authentic Christian life, and learn that those who practice authentic piety are on the good way (Gáncs 1930:579).

CHAPTER IX

THE POSSIBILITIES OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY FOR THE FORMULATION OF A THEOLOGY OF CULTURE IN TRANSYLVANIA

Karl Barth's reception in Transylvania raised many issues which give a good insight into the theology and church life of the Reformed Church there. During my research I realised that the reception touched on different ideas and church problems that would be interesting and profitable to deal with. These issues, apart from those mentioned in this thesis, are religious education, the mission of the church and 'praxis pietatis'. Although these issues were impacted by the reception of the theology of the Word it is not possible to deal with them in this thesis, due to lack of space, but they might become topics for further research. In this prospective chapter I only want to deal with the possibility of constructing a theology of culture in Transylvania along the lines of Barthian thinking. The reason for exploring this issue is that this has been the idea that has emerged quite often in my analysis of different doctrines and thoughts. At the same time it is an important issue for the Reformed Church in Transylvania because this church has had to repeatedly face this issue in the course of its history. Since the 'people's church' character of the Reformed Church in Transylvania has been manifested in a minority situation, the relationship of the church to the society at large has been of vital importance.

A. Barth's Theology of Culture

For a discussion on culture it is important to clarify the concept of culture. 'Culture' can refer to 'civilization', or 'education' as a characteristic of a cultured person or society, but it also has an anthropological sense denoting the patterns of 'meaning that we give to all the events in our lives' (Fiddes 2001:8). The former is called 'high culture' or culturedness, the latter 'low culture' or the anthropological sense of 'culture'. The anthropological meaning of culture, as Kathryn Tanner shows, appeared only after the 1920s, mainly on the American continent from where it slowly influenced European thinking as well (Tanner 1997:25). Culture understood in this larger sense of life-context becomes the context of the theological task, which is seriously discussed today in contextual mission studies.

The later Barth spoke about 'the lower and higher branches' of civilisation (Barth 1967[1956]:44), corresponding to these two senses of culture. Robert J. Palma suggests that Barth is more interested in the second branch. He says this not only on the basis of his written works, but considering 'those areas of human activity to which he gave so much attention, viz., theology, philosophy, music, literature, politics, and all that might be summed up in the term *Kulturprotestantismus*' (Palma 1983:9). To such culture Barth said 'yes', since it is 'the task set through the Word of God for achieving the destined condition of man in unity of soul and body' (Barth 1962[1928]:337), but he also said 'no' insofar it mirrors human presumption and unbelief. However, thinks Paul Louis Metzger (2003:xiv), a more serious reflection on Barth's definitions and expositions reveals that although Barth gave a special attention to higher culture, his concern was not limited to that sphere only.

Barth's development of theology of culture follows the general direction of his theology of revelation and the Word of God. Through different stages of development he reached from a *diastasis* between God and world to a more free theology of culture.

1. Culture and God in Diastasis

The 'implicit cultural potential' (Metzger 2003:xv) in Barth's dialectical phase emerges as a diastasis between culture and God (see III.B). Barth's position that God is God, and man is man, posits God on the other side of a diastasis opposing man, history and all that we can call culture both in the sense of high or low culture.

In his 1920 essay 'Unsettled Questions for Theology Today' he refers to Franz Overbeck's critique of Christianity to reinforce his own position and critique: it is impossible to bring God into the world of history (Busch 1976:115). Barth stresses the idea which is familiar to us from *Romans II*, that humanity and God belong to different realms and that theology deals with God existing in his own realm.

In Barth's argument about the relationship of culture and theology I see two strands of thought. He first argues that Christianity is more than history: it belongs to supra-history, and cannot be understood without being in touch with this reality (Barth 1962[1928]:62). Second, he asserts that history has sense for us only in the light of the last things (Parousia). He makes a critique of actual Christianity (church history) saying that 'after the expectation of the Parousia had lost its reality, Christianity lost its youth and itself. It has become something wholly different; it has become a religion, an *ideological antidote*' (Barth 1962[1928]:64).

The diastasis of God and world can also be felt in Barth's dialogue with Harnack in 1923 (Rumscheidt 1972). It is clear from the dialogue that Barth understood that the nature of faith stands in opposition to what the world is; faith does not belong to this world but is awakened by God. This faith 'will never be able to avoid completely the

necessity of a more or less radical protest against the world as surely as it is a hope for the promised but invisible gift' (Rumscheidt 1972:32). Barth at this time still maintains an 'utter contrast' between God and the world and the unity between the Creator and creature can only be accomplished through the cross and not by a 'shallow doctrine of creation'. Barth thought that statements about God derived from the 'development of culture' may have their social value, but they are not to be considered 'preaching of the gospel'. This issue belongs to the larger area of natural revelation together with issues related to morals, knowledge and aesthetics the sources of which Harnack also could find in 'cultural development' known through 'historical knowledge and critical reflection' (Rumscheidt 1972:30).

2. Signs of the Kingdom

The sharp diastasis will soon be loosed up in Barth's thinking and give way to a closer association of God and the world. The main emphasis in the early Barth is indeed on this diastasis, but we also can find some seeds of a more reconciling approach. It was Barth's preoccupation to bring society to Christ, and Christ to society (Barth 1935[1924]:281).

The separation of the two cannot be ultimate for then God would not be God. There *must still* be a way from there to here. And with this 'must' and 'still' we confess to the miracle of the *revelation* of God... The *mysterium tremendum* phase, which comes first, finally ceases, and with it that dread of the divine, which is dread and dread alone (Barth 1935[1924]:287).

Barth finds in the possibility of revelation a possibility of bridging the diastasis, which is 'God's coming down', his act and not man's. The 'bridging' will slowly unfold in Barth's further theological development presented in his 1926 lecture *Church and Culture*, as he comes closer to a more Christological understanding of the Word of God (Barth 1962[1928]). This lecture is indeed a signpost to further theological

developments in which he casts a look at the cultural activity of society itself. It seems to me that this starting point determines Barth's whole approach to culture which he defines as 'the task set through the Word of God for achieving the destined condition of man in unity of soul and body' (Barth 1962[1928]:337). In this way culture in fact is what the church that hears the Word of God should become in its human form as one that lives in a certain social setting. The problem of culture is the achievement of true humanity, but this task is understood only by those who hear the Word of God – that is the church (Barth 1962[1928]:339).

Barth in this period comes very close to Calvin's natural theology. There is, however, a significant difference between Calvin and Barth. When Calvin speaks of a natural revelation, the knowledge of God being 'naturally implanted in the minds of man' (Inst I.iii) and manifested in the natural sphere in a static way, nature itself is reflecting the glory of God without and apart from a contemporaneous revealing act of God. This road, however, led Calvin to a dead end since he declared that, although God is manifested in nature, man has no eyes to see this manifestation (Inst I.v.14). Barth does not relate any revelation to the natural realm, but to the activity of Christ. He thinks that Christ rules in the kingdom of nature (*regnum naturae*), since the kingdom of the Logos is above the contradiction of the Fall and reconciliation. It is true, that in itself, we know nothing about this kingdom, says Barth: Christ's rule is an 'indispensable presupposition among the sinners' and in the 'incarnation of the Word, in the reconciliation through Christ, this presupposition subsists' (Barth 1962[1928]:342). The concept of natural theology which emerges from Calvin's approach is brought by Barth into clear light in the theology of revelation. He acknowledged that '*grace does not destroy nature but completes it*', and that the Word of God, and nothing else, is that 'brings into full light the buried and forgotten truth of creation' (Barth 1962[1928]:342). This is true, Barth reminds us, not through an 'independent actual relation between God

and nature, God and history, God and human reason' since the unity can be accomplished only if the 'Word is spoken and received in the world of sinners'. This is possible since there is a 'promise of divine friendship, approving man' (Barth 1962[1928]:342).

The works of culture are ranked by Barth as the *earthly signs* by which God's goodness and his friendship for all people become visible. The signs are not limited to the borders of the church, since the active kingship of Christ expressed in these earthly signs can be found in the whole world, promising and announcing the Kingdom of God. Barth however does not sanctify the general achievements of culture like Schleiermacher did, and refuses the idea that 'culture may [itself] be revelatory'. Barth speaks a word of warning to the Church to be careful when looking at concrete cases that may affirm the presence of the promises. At the same time

it would be astounding if no cases for such recognition were to be found by the Church; and the Church would certainly be badly off if it refused to recognise any. The Church will not see the coming of the kingdom of God in any human cultural achievement, but it will be alert for the signs which, perhaps in many cultural achievements, announce that the kingdom approaches (Barth 1962[1928]:344).

The church needs to know – says Barth – that human activity, can be a *symbol which is transparent and meaningful* and which is part of the promise originally given to man. This symbol, however, is possible not because of the inherent divine in man or society, but *because of the reconciliation in Christ* (Barth 1962[1928]:352).

In Barth's exposition of the problem of culture we can sense the increasing influence of his Christological approach, which will blossom in the next period. In 1926, however, he still emphasises the *eschatological form of the Word of God*; Christ 'who is to come again with his *I make all things new*' (Barth 1962[1928]:354).

3. Culture as a Parable of the Kingdom

By means of the analogy of faith and Christological method Barth manages to speak about Jesus Christ as the light of the world (see III.E and McCormack 1997:362, 367, 435). For Barth it became important to speak about the activity of Christ in the world, which is revelation outside the walls of the church in forms of 'true words'. This cannot be called 'natural revelation' since Barth would refuse to link revelation either to nature or to culture. However, despite the fact that Barth himself does not distinguish between the terms 'natural revelation' and 'general revelation', we might well use the term 'general revelation' to denote Barth's view of the self-manifestation of Christ in the general setting of the culture. These are the words *extra muros ecclesiae* and are the *parables of the Kingdom of God* as I presented it in section III. E (see CD IV.3.1:135ff.). These parables do not contain the light themselves, but only reflect the light of Christ, who is the only light of the world.

It is very important to note about Barth's theological development that in his later period he managed to see that it is possible to talk about revelation outside the walls of the church ('general revelation' in the sense I am using it), but that we cannot speak about revelation outside Jesus Christ. There is no legitimacy for natural theology since nature cannot reveal God. Only Christ can reveal God, who can work even in culture. We should not forget, however, that Christ is the criterion by which we measure all 'true words' we hear in our culture.

B. Towards an Indigenous Theology of Culture

It is evident from what I have shown above that for Transylvanian theology one of the challenges that came from meeting Barth was the challenge to formulate an indigenous theology of culture, which is set properly 'under the predicament of revelation'.

We have seen that Barth's theology in Transylvania was unfairly accused of anti-culturalism (see III.B and C). Géza Nagy regarded the 'anti-cultural character' of dialectical theology as one of the two major hindrances to its being accepted on a larger scale. The 'anti-cultural feature' of dialectical theology 'in Transylvania' says Nagy, 'would cause a certain danger, and let's add that it would be alien to the spirit of Calvinism, too' (Nagy G 1995:180). Gyula Dávid wanted to soften the charge of anti-culturalism when he examined Barth's early writings on culture, which I have presented above in brief (see VII.E). I cannot undertake here the task of working out a thorough theology of culture based on Barth's theology. I only want to consider some of the issues brought out by the reception of Karl Barth in Transylvania, with the goal of formulating some guidelines for constructing a theology of culture which would attend both to Transylvanian distinctiveness, and to the potential of Karl Barth's theology of the Word.

1. Relating to the Whole of Barth's Life-work

To have a correct grasp of Barth one needs to follow the whole way of Barth's development. This is true for the whole body of his teaching, especially for the issue of culture. Since Transylvanian theologians were not able to follow this development – due to the specific historical situation – the anomalies I have presented inevitably arose and Barthian thought could not exercise its full potential in Transylvania.

In the first part of this chapter we saw how Barth's theological development shaped three stages in his understanding of culture. Makkai and Tankó related to the first stage of Barth's development, when he still regarded culture and the kingdom of God in diastasis. Their reaction was of strong criticism and rejection. Dávid in his 1930 essay related to Barth's second phase expressed in his *Church and Culture* lecture delivered in 1926 (Barth 1962[1928]), where Barth was still dominated by his

eschatological view on culture. His teaching in this phase includes the insights that 'grace does not destroy nature, but completes it' and that the works of culture can be 'earthly symbols' of the coming Kingdom of Christ. For a Christological theology it is significant that Barth views world and God, nature and grace as being brought together only if the 'Word is spoken and received in the world of sinners' (Barth 1962[1928]:342). Certainly there is more here than Dávid could bring out when Barth's Christological emphasis was not yet perceived in Transylvania.

Drawing from Barth's thought of this period, one has to keep in mind what Barth says about the 'limit of culture': 'from the point of view of redemption... culture is the limit set for men, on the other side of which God himself... makes all things new' (Barth 1962[1928]:347). This means that the fulfilment of the goal of culture is an eschatological concept and with this 'eschatological anticipation, the church confronts society' (Barth 1962[1928]:347). The church should not under-value cultural achievements in society, and it has to confer on them real value in the light of the goal of culture: while culture cannot attain its own goals by itself, the goals are valid as reflecting the purpose of God for human life.

[A]rt and science, business and politics, techniques and education are really a game – a serious game, but a game, and game means an imitative and ultimately ineffective activity – the significance of which lies not in its attainable goals but in what it signifies (Barth 1962[1928]:349).

Having such a perspective would save the church from divinising the culture, or from being exhausted by cultural work, instead of concentrating its attention fully on the ministry of the Word.

In the task of clarifying its mission the church has to reconsider its historical role. While in the interwar period the church was forced to let the national/cultural life take refuge inside its walls, the present political and social situation seem to present different characteristics. After the collapse of Communism in Transylvania slowly emerge those

political, social and cultural institutions which can protect and foster the Hungarian minority, so the church can better concentrate on its mission.

The full power of Barth's theology, however, emerges in the third phase of his work, when he sees even more clearly that the 'signs of the kingdom' and the 'true words' related to the kingdom can appear in culture. He successfully avoids the traps of natural theology but nevertheless confers reality on the work of Christ outside the walls of the church. If this Christological view of culture presented by Karl Barth could be appreciated by Transylvanian Reformed theologians, I believe that they would have the theological resources to work reflections on the signs of the kingdom and 'true words' in culture into a coherent theology of culture.

2. Clarifying the Concept of Culture

I have shown above that for relating efficiently to culture and to work out an adequate theology of culture it is necessary to understand the difference between culture as 'culturedness' and the anthropological sense of culture. This awareness of such an understanding of culture during the time our study refers to was not yet emerging in Transylvania. Under German influence, as we have seen in Makkai's and Tavaszy's case, 'culture' meant 'high culture' or culturedness of the individual and of society (for Makkai see II.B.2.a for Tavaszy VI.B.2.f). In Germany the appropriation of 'culture' was related to 'personal cultivation of one's spiritual and intellectual gifts' (Tanner 1997:4). Since Transylvanian theologians were close to German spiritual and intellectual life, they also regarded culture in this manner. This concept of culture was present in Hungarian society well before the appearance of dialectical theology on the theological scene. Culture as the 'highest achievement' of society' in the spiritual and intellectual realm prompted Makkai's program of 'spiritual church in a spiritual nation'. The appeal to a sense of 'high culture', rather than the 'lower' sense of the whole life of

a people, can have a nationalistic overtone, as indeed it had in the case of the emerging nineteenth century German non-noble intelligentsia, to elevate Germany vis-à-vis other nations like France (Tanner 1997:9).

Something similar happened in Transylvania, when *Transylvanianism* appeared. Transylvanian intelligentsia wanted to secure a minority existence, and indeed a cultural superiority by means of 'cultural achievements' (See II.B.1). When relating to culture, the church has to be clear about her mission. Historical events may seem to force on it cultural burdens, but its main mission is not to promote high culture for the sake of strengthening national identity or the identity of certain social groups in the society.

3. General versus Natural Revelation

On the doctrine of general revelation the Transylvanian theologians disagreed with Karl Barth. They thought that the work of God cannot be restricted as rigidly as Barth did, only to the sphere of special revelation. We must observe that the Transylvanians understood something that the early Barth overlooked and to which he came back in his mature period. They knew that there is a need to keep general revelation if one is interested in spelling out a theology of culture.

Tavaszy in the process of Barth's reception emphasised the transcendental character of revelation, and he maintained with the early Barth that revelation and history are incommensurable categories (see VI.B.2 and Tavaszy 1929a:28). We have seen in section VII.B.2 that although Dániel Borbáth made an effort to follow Barth in his doctrine of revelation, comparing him with Calvin and Brunner, Borbáth thought that Barth was one-sided in his doctrine of revelation (Borbáth 1931:164). He embraced Calvin's more static concept of natural revelation in which he stated that God has revealed himself as Creator in the 'human mind and the constitution of the world since we can see his majesty in all places of this world' (see Inst I.iii).

Géza Nagy also criticised Barth's teaching on general revelation. He said that 'real life is much more under God's rule than Barth would like to admit' (Nagy G 1930:608). In 1930 Nagy could not have known about Barth's later development and he thought that Barth excluded the possibility of revelation and the Word of God outside the church. He thought it is necessary for Barth to give more emphasis to the doctrine of *general grace* as Calvin and Kuyper did in order to link theological thinking more explicitly to cultural life (Nagy G 1930:615). It seems, however, that Nagy was not specifically following Calvin's type of natural theology, built as it was on the inherent potential of nature to reveal God, when he spoke about revelation 'outside Christianity'. Instead he thought about a more dynamic will of God and regarded life 'under God's rule'. His thinking, for all that, is not characterised by the Christ-centeredness which is typical of the later Barth.

We can only appreciate the eagerness with which Transylvanian theologians hold to general revelation, since this must be a decisive element of any theology of culture. The merit of the later Barth is that he gives the possibility for such a theology which is based on the Word of God when he speaks about 'other lights' as reflections of the 'only light of the world', Jesus Christ. By doing this Barth makes possible for us to differentiate between the concept of 'natural revelation' and that of 'general revelation'. By admitting the possibility of 'other lights' Barth also thinks that it would not be correct to limit Christ's work in this world to the sphere of the church, but he thinks that it is important for us not to make normative for theology this revelatory work of Christ in the constitution of humanity and world. He summons us to measure the 'true words' we can hear 'outside of the wall of the church' with the canon of the Word of God that resounds in the church (CD 4.3.1:126).

In 2002, Zsolt Kozma has revisited the issue of natural theology presented by Barth. He thinks that some changes took place in Barth's thinking after 1934. According

to Kozma, the Barth of the 1940s and 1950s, while still holding to the impossibility of knowing God through natural revelation, gave up emphasising the negation, and laid stress on the idea that 'in Jesus Christ man is capable of covenant, and in him and through him man is not only addressable but is able to respond ... and can see that there is a natural revelation pertaining, which actually is super-natural' (Kozma 2002:153). This strand of thought suggested by Kozma is in fact presented in the *Church Dogmatics* Volume 3 Part 2, and is the further development of analogy of relations. It has not yet reached the point of reflecting on 'Christ the light of the world', and developing this teaching into a kind of general revelation as it is found in the *Dogmatics* Volume 3 Part 3. A cultural theology based on a concept of general revelation such as referred to above would avoid the danger of divinising both the world and 'high culture' and would avoid the danger of mobilising the life of the church to support mere 'cultural work'. The real danger of this kind of approach was often lurking in church life in Transylvania.

4. Christological Understanding of God's Presence in Culture

We have seen above that Barth's definition of the goal of culture was determined by the Word of God, in order that humans may reach their 'destined condition' (Barth 1962[1928]:337). Culture, however, can only reach its goal when God is acting.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the world was another important topic the Transylvanian theologians concentrated on in the context of Barth's reception. In this thesis the issue was first raised in connection with the theology that wanted to build on Böhm's philosophy. We have seen that the Transylvanian theologians, being still indebted to liberal thinking, reinterpreted Böhm's concept of the spirit and spoke about 'the Spirit' as God's projection in the world (see II.C.2.c and Bartók 2002[1934]:192). Later, Tavaszy wrote more extensively about the relationship of the Spirit with culture,

especially with respect to philosophy. He drew on the concept of the Absolute Spirit, a concept which he coloured with ideas from the philosophical thinking of Kant, Hegel and Böhm (section VI.C.3). Although he did not use a theological language, he came close to concepts of the later Barth when he said that due to the activity of the Spirit a positive culture can emerge. The activity of the Spirit in this understanding belongs to the area of 'general revelation' in what I have been suggesting is a Barthian sense, although Tavaszy was not always clear in his formulation about the Spirit since he did not dissociate the activity of the Spirit from every kind of human activity based on natural endowment (Tavaszy 1999:46). In this way Tavaszy exposes his concept of the Spirit to the danger of becoming indistinguishable from natural revelation. The role of Barth's theology in formulating an indigenous theology of culture in Transylvania would be to help segregate the work of the Spirit from any kind of natural and cultural dependency and to help towards conceiving it as God's active work done through Christ in the world.

The Christ-centredness of a theology of culture is also missing from Gyula Dávid's interpretation. Dávid, in agreement with Barth, places the anthropological question in the centre of the theology of culture. Although the goal of culture is the 'ideal man', culture itself is not able to bring it forward, because only the Word of God is capable of this. For this reason, says Dávid, a theology of culture has to consider seriously the issue of sin. The fact that Barth locked up everything under the judgment due for sin reflects 'Barth's anti-cultural attitude', says Dávid (Dávid 1930:221). A statement such as this reflects that Gyula Dávid operates with a concept of 'higher culture'. The judgement due to sin, says Dávid, points towards what 'lies behind the earthly barrier' to which the Word of God refers: 'I will make all things new!' (Dávid 1930:224). If Dávid had known the later Barth he could not only have defined the goal

of culture in the eschaton, but could also have found a place for Christ's light in the world in the present.

Barth's Christological approach in interpreting God's presence in culture saves us from the danger of that 'Spirit' language which can easily drift from a theological discourse to a philosophical one. We have seen this happening with Tavaszy and Makkai when they tried to interpret Böhm's philosophy for the benefit of theology. To avoid the allurements of philosophy it would be better for a theology of culture to adopt a Trinitarian language in which all the persons of the Trinity are involved in the divine relationship with culture. Coming from a more philosophy-oriented theology it is no wonder that the treatment of the Trinity is almost missing in Transylvanian theological investigation.

Another positive difference a Trinitarian/Christological approach would make, beyond the negative contribution of warning us against conforming the Spirit of God to a philosophical concept of spirit is that it would direct our attention to personal relations in love. A relational view of the Spirit, in the context of the Father and the Son, alerts us to patterns of human relationship in culture – both high and low - which enable human life to flourish, and which can in turn help to illuminate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

5. 'Nation' and Culture in Need of Redemption

Parallel with Tavaszy's interpretation of culture runs his theology of 'nation'. As the 'ideal man' is the goal of culture, so is 'nation' for the 'people' (see VI.B.2.f). This is understandable since nationality belongs to the larger sphere of culture. Tavaszy, although he did not know Barth's later theological position, says that the power of revelation penetrates the human sphere, making it part of revelation (Tavaszy 1929d:52). In this context we can speak about Christian and secular culture. There is a

similarity between the issue of culture and that of the 'nation'. The accomplishment of the nation as the ideal of the people can be achieved in two ways. There is first a *humanist approach*, asserts Tavaszy, by which one 'attempts to maximise one's spiritual power to accomplish a human ideal' for the people (Tavaszy 1944b:281). But second, when the ideal of the nation is desired to be accomplished through following Christ, this is called by Tavaszy a *Christian view of nation* and *pure ethical nationalism*. This argument is valid, although we cannot say that it is under the seminal influence of Barthian thought.

Barth on the occasion of his visit to Transylvania in 1936 answered some questions related to the issue of nationality and culture. He argued that belonging to a certain nation pertains to human identity and human existence, the biblical name of which is *flesh* (*sarx*) and which is under the judgement of God awaiting redemption. However, 'nationality' and 'national culture' can become 'such human factors that God assumed in their sinful and lost state' (Barth 1937c:135). Belonging to a national culture is a reason for one to be thankful, since it can be taken as a gift from God. At the same time this *sarx*, to which one belongs, is given the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Barth emphasises that God has no favourite people and nobody can have a claim on 'heaven on the basis of one's historical merits' (Barth 1937c:137). 'In the Christian church', says Barth, 'beyond all national boundaries we see the fellowship of the Word and the fellowship of grace... we are first in the church and only subsequently in the nation' (Barth 1937c:137). By this argument Barth subordinates national consciousness to Christian consciousness. The passionate appeal that Barth addressed to the Transylvanians in 1936 has to be regarded as a strong warning in the process of defining a theology of culture that is founded on the Word of God:

Seek first the Kingdom of God, and you will have all the others! Nothing else will help, the flesh will burst the life of the people, and the idols deprave the people. Let us

not serve the idols, but preach the Word, knowing this is the only necessary thing for our people (Barth 1937d:81).

The theological significance of the issue of culture and nationality, continues Barth, is that we believe in the resurrection also in connection with our people:

It is permitted to us to look at the life of our people as to something which is on the way towards the last things, towards the end of all created things... this is not about reaching perfection, but it is about the resurrection of the body, a resurrection from the dead (Barth 1937d:81).

We can see some reflections from Barth in Tavaszy's thinking, but in Barth's position, what I call 'nationalism of the Word' is better expressed. This nationalism will neither make us worshippers of our nation nor lead us to a rejection of other people. Tavaszy's view of nation has to be released from all kinds of aspects of value philosophy (VI.B.2.f) and has to be brought solely into the light of the Word of God.

If we were brave enough to be nationalist with the perspective of the eschaton, then we could be sure that we do not make an idol out of our nationalism. Then our love towards our nation would not become something which today is called nationalism, but it would be a part of our due worship from which task we could not be able to absolve ourselves (Barth 1937c:138).

Reflecting back on Tavaszy and his colleagues Zsolt Kozma today has a similar thinking in this respect. He says that 'Hungarianness' and 'Christianity' can not be played against each other. He complains about those Transylvanians 'that are Christians in order to be able to remain Hungarians' (Kozma 2001:153). In critical historical times these people take refuge in the institution of the church. Since, however, for them 'being a Christian is valuable as long as it serves the Hungarian ethos', when the crisis is over, they soon leave the church. Kozma, although he does not separate 'nation' and 'church', thinks that 'not a national trend is that which is needed in the church, but a Christian "trend" is needed in the nation' (Kozma 2001:153).

C. 'KARL BARTH BEFORE US'

In this thesis I have tried to show that in Transylvania Karl Barth's theology was received in a limited measure. I hope that this is not taken to mean a denigration of the influence Barth had and still has on the Transylvanian Reformed Church and on Central European Protestantism. Certainly Zsolt Kozma is right in saying:

Here in Transylvania the theology of the Word was the determinant factor of the life of the whole church when in the West all kinds of isms and theologies alternated with each other. We do not care whether others consider our *Barthian theology* old and outdated. Perhaps, we were unilateral, and we should pay attention to the charge of being uncritical, but we ask everybody to understand this: the theology of the Word protected us not only from an anthropocentric theology, but especially from the false humanism dictated by Communist morality (immorality) (Kozma Zs 2001:122).

In my thesis I have also attempted to make clear that the theology of Karl Barth has more potential for an indigenous theology in Transylvania than those who walked before us made use of. Lajos Békefy is right to apply Eberhard Jüngel's observation about the importance of Karl Barth for contemporary theology to Hungarian Reformed theology: 'Barth is still far away in front of us, of our age! It would not be unprofitable to start anew in his footsteps' (Békefy 1999:141).

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In the Hungarian referencing in Transylvania, in the case of journals, usually only the year of publication and the page number is given. The issues of a year are page numbered together so the volume and issue information is less relevant. I also follow this method. After the publication date I give in strait brackets the publication date of the original work, where this is relevant, and after the Hungarian title of each book or article I give the title in English.

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